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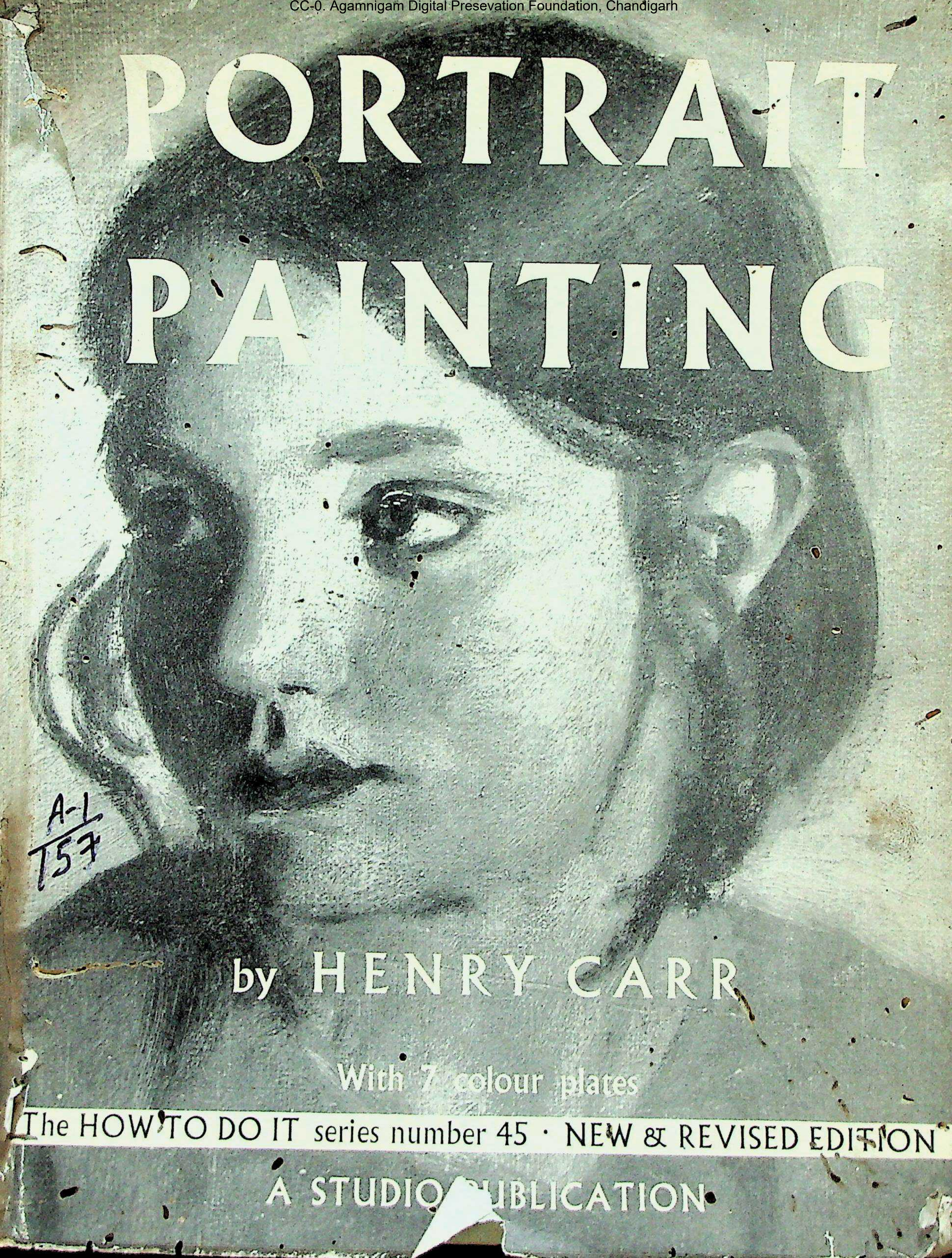

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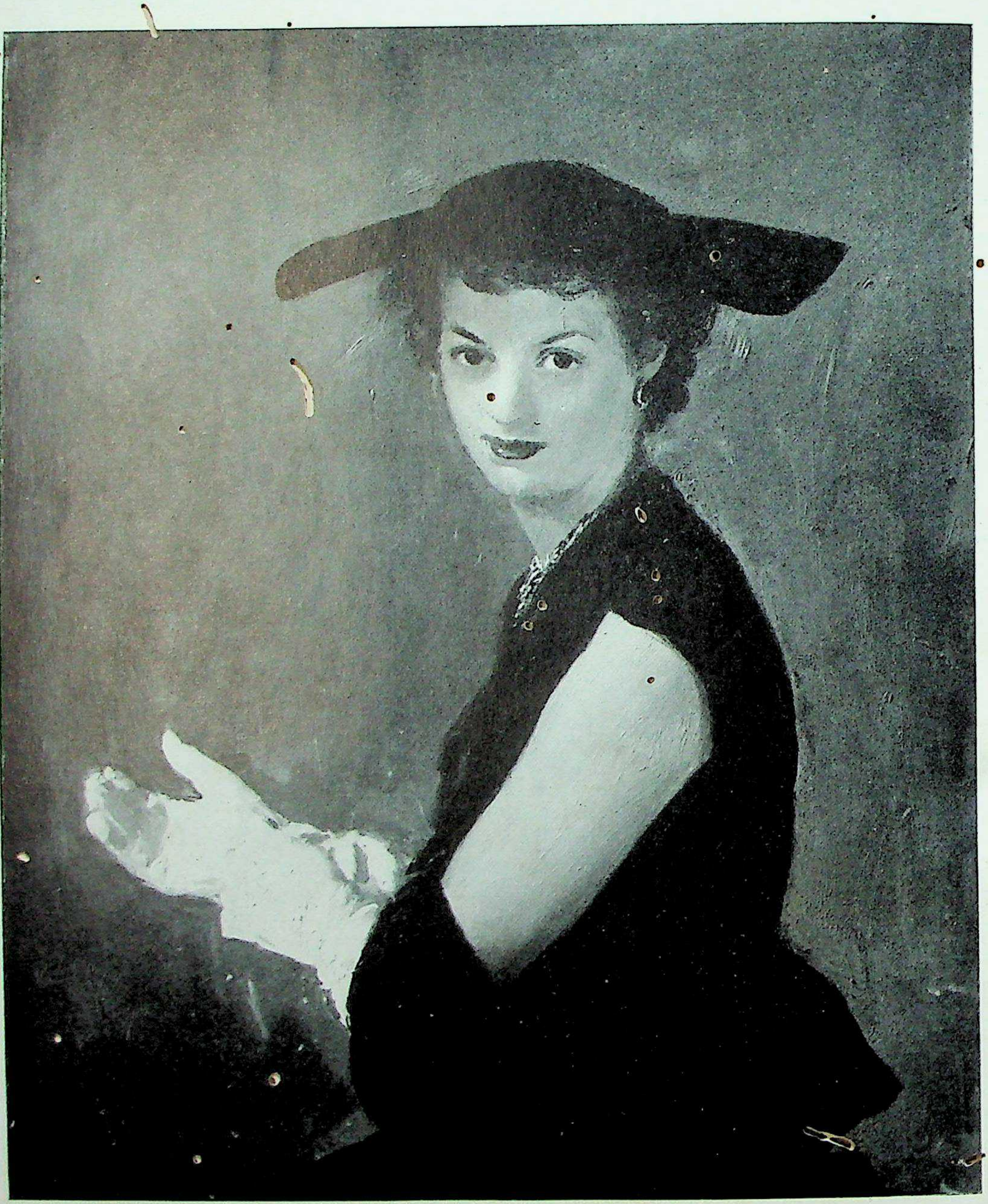

HENRY CARR *Elizabeth*

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PORTRAIT PAINTING

HOW TO DO IT
45

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The Studio Publications
LONDON & NEW YORK

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First published 1952
New edition 1958
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757

Published in London by The Studio Ltd, Hulton House, Fleet Street, EC4
and in New York City by The Studio Publications Inc, 432 Fourth Avenue.
Made and printed in England by W. & J. Mackay & Co Ltd, Chatham.

Contents

PREFACE 6

EQUIPMENT 8
Canvas · brushes · paint · palette · easel · throne

METHOD 17
Drawing · the approach · design · dress · the model · lighting and background

THE SITTINGS 28
Margaret stages 1–5 · male portraits · child portraits · formal portraits

QUALITIES 60
Texture · colour and tone relationship · observation · aesthetics · perspective · light and shade · contours · antique heads · dress · hands · the skull · lips · the eye

CONCLUSION 78

PLATES

★ *indicates a colour plate*

Rembrandt *A Jew Merchant* 59
Leonardo da Vinci
★ *Madonna of the Rocks* (*detail*) 80
Velazquez
★ *The Lady with a Fan* 83
Thomas Gainsborough
★ *Mrs Horton, afterwards Ann, Duchess of Marlborough* 84
Edgar Degas
Diego Martelli 87
Amedeo Modigliani
Portrait of Mme Zborowska 89
Auguste Renoir
★ *In the Meadow* 90
Grant Wood
★ *American Gothic* 93
Vincent Van Gogh
Self-portrait 94

PORTRAITS BY HENRY CARR

★ *Elizabeth* *frontis*
Margaret 29
Mrs Bradford 47
Leonard Jennings 49
J. B. Priestley 50–1
Father Valentin 52
Cécile 55
The Artist's American Granddaughter 57

PREFACE

MY AIM in writing this book is to impart as much factual knowledge as possible, and to illustrate how such knowledge can be used efficiently for the reproduction on canvas of a solid form—particularly the form of the head—by the medium of oil paint. Further, to make as clear as possible the realities of portrait painting and their relation to aesthetic interests; to show the necessity for an appreciation of the large relationships of form; and to explain exactly what one means by such terms. For example, how appreciation of rhythm, tone and colour is concerned with the painting of a portrait; the place of design and texture in such a painting; and how the dominating and unifying factor in all these things is the portrayal of the character or quality of the sitter—for it need hardly be said that, in portrait painting, the likeness of the portrait to the sitter is of primary importance.

It is obvious that feeling an emotional reaction to what one sees plays a large part in successful painting and that this is a personal thing concerning which no laws or rules can be made. Nevertheless it is the most important part of painting and the difficulty of dealing with it makes all instruction, even personal instruction, somewhat inadequate. The student may discover that he has this successful quality or he may hope to cultivate it in practising the art.

The art of portrait painting has, of course, been practised by artists for many centuries. Naturally, there are many wonderful examples of it in existence, and there is little doubt that the best of these portraits are excellent likenesses of the people portrayed. A fundamental truth that must be an article of faith to the portrait artist is that the art of portrait painting lies in giving force and power to the character and quality of his sitter. The holding of such faith makes it clear that the artist must be animated by a powerful urge to paint portraits, and that this urge must be derived from a deep interest in his fellow men. It might be a cold appraisal, or it might be full of warm humanity. The great point is that the interest must be there.

With regard to the medium and methods used in portrait painting, there are several controlling factors. Knowledge gained from examples of the work of portrait painters from ancient times right up to to-day is our birthright, and, in so far as it is part of our artistic education, it is bound to have its influence. The technique practised to-day must also influence us, as must the patronage that demands a certain style. This patronage may have a good or a bad influence on the creative artist, who is at liberty to use it or reject it. As a general rule, however, it can be argued that any deliberate return to earlier styles is an indication of a lack of interest in present-day life, and that is a powerful hindrance to the creation of first-class works of art.

First-class portraiture, then, may be said to spring (when the birthright of history has been assimilated) from current fashions in techniques, such as the present-day use of oil

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colour, together with the development and use of such forms, tones, colours and methods of handling as are precisely suited to the expressive quality desired. The development of form, tone, colour and methods of handling, will be dominated by this particular interest. The more powerful this interest, the simpler will be the problems of painting. The simpler the point of view the more direct the expression. It is when the aim is confused that difficulties crowd in.

This book has been written with the belief that the real portrait painter effaces himself. He is not interested in showing his own cleverness—his own artistry. He is not interested in good taste. He remains as coldly observant as the scientist, even though he may be appreciating in his sitter the rich warm glow of humanity. His enthusiasm must be secondary to his analysis. Whatever qualities of painting he possesses must arise from his ruthless search for solutions to the problem of stating clearly on canvas the interest he feels in his sitters.

That this apparent sacrifice of personality on the part of the artist will allow for complete development of it; that talent will eventually be displayed to the full; and that the aesthetic content of a painting comes from the revelation of some fundamental truth—of these things there is no doubt at all.

One last but important observation in this preface. The technical problems involved in painting a portrait are by no means the most important. Time and effort will eventually overcome them. We must remember that talent is dirt cheap. What *is* important is the vitality of the interests that make us pursue our ideals at all cost for as long as we live.

Equipment

CANVAS

THE SURFACE on which one paints has a most important bearing on the finished painting. This is a major point, and it is impossible to be too emphatic about it. There must be thousands of paintings embarked on every year that are doomed from the start because the surface is wrong—and a wrong surface is an almost impossible handicap. Painting is difficult enough, in all conscience, without unnecessarily adding an almost insurmountable obstacle. So the choice of surface should have the most careful consideration of every student.

Clarity of vision, that is knowing exactly what one wants to express, leads to directness in the handling of the medium, and this, in its turn, leads to a satisfactory surface quality. If this directness of handling is hampered by a bad surface, the result is hardly likely to be so good as it would have been had the surface been actually helpful.

The method of painting portraits described in this book starts with having a canvas on which to paint.

Canvas has been for several hundred years the favourite surface for oil painting. Partly because the surface when properly prepared is very delightful to paint on and partly because paintings on canvas are easily portable. It is almost impossible to find other materials that could offer such a large and unbroken surface.

To-day we can buy many varieties of canvas; but experiments can and should be made until the ideal surface is found. There are many books on the subject that deal fully with the preparation of canvases.

There are absorbent and non-absorbent grounds, as well as varieties of texture of the ground itself and of the weave of the canvas. Any change in surface requires, to some extent, a change in the subsequent methods of painting, so that the sooner a decision is reached as to the most suitable surface, the sooner a definite method of attack on the painting can be organized, and consistently pursued until the process is confidently mastered.

Everybody has his favourite painters, and a study of their work should give some clue to one's own method of approach. All oil painting looks better if there is a good thickness of paint, so that, if the painting is to be done very thinly, there must be a good firm ground of paint underneath it, with the weave of the canvas fairly fine. If, on the other

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hand, the painting is to be done thickly, then the ground need not be so solid, and the weave of the canvas could be more open.

Artists' colourmen supply all varieties of canvas and I use one which over a long period of time I have got used to and which suits my particular method. To this I give a further coating of paint consisting of Titanium White toned down with a little colour from my palette, and thinned with turpentine. I usually vary from a warm to a cold grey, according to what I am going to paint, and I do not apply the tone absolutely evenly. It is more sympathetic to start the painting on a broken surface than on one of perfectly even tone. Even at this early stage it is pleasant to see the canvas with an interesting texture.

Pictures have been done on wood and metal but these are in most cases small in scale. Today hard woods, plywoods and sheet metal are excellent materials on which to work, particularly from the durability point of view. But on the whole they are not so sensitive, nor so pleasant to work on, and their surfaces do not equal that of canvas because of its texture—though, of course, the simple fact that I have worked on it for a long time and know how to deal with it gives it an added attraction for me. There is no doubt that some of the newer materials are cheaper, which is important, and some undoubtedly are excellent for quick sketches. With some experimenting in the preparation of the surface it might be found that some of these new materials might eventually prove to be better than canvas. Ordinary drawing paper with a coat of thin size is excellent too for quick sketches.

There are many excellent books on materials and if the painter dealing with the preparation of canvases or other materials on which to work is a serious student likely to make painting his life's work, then these books should be read. But for the average person a little common sense can go a long way. It is obvious that it would be impossible to paint on a surface like velvet and that it would be difficult to manipulate paint on a very highly glazed surface like glass, or shiny plastic.

BRUSHES

HOG BRUSHES are in most general use, with a few fine sables for precise drawing. This is because the hog brush is most useful in covering a surface with a pronounced texture like canvas and its popularity is due to the fact that canvas has been used for painting for a long time. For a fine-grained surface like wood or even a finely grained canvas, sable would be better as the paint goes on in a smoother way.

Some artists use sables most of the time, but in tackling life-sized heads I should advise the use of hog brushes. Various sizes are required, and although it is a good rule to use as large a brush as possible, it is certainly advisable to have a good selection of small ones. The logical thing to do is to use the size of brush most suitable to the area to be painted.

Brushes are made in various shapes as well as sizes. It will take some experience to determine what shapes and sizes are preferred. The application of paint in short deliberate strokes might best be done with a short square brush, while long flowing strokes would require a thick and long-haired brush. The idea is to have separate brushes for lights, half-tones and darks, in the sizes necessary to the particular piece of painting. Brushes do get a little mixed during a painting, and most painters carry a rag on the palette to wipe clean a brush that has been used for the wrong colour, or is too clogged with paint. In actual practice it is wise to carry with the palette only the brushes that one needs and, if a further brush is required, to pick up a clean one from the box, and to put down any brush that will not be wanted for some time. A great handful of dirty brushes is confusing.

As I have said, it is advisable to use as large a brush as possible, and some effort is often demanded to fight a tendency to use continually the small brushes. If the use of small brushes is by design (and many of the Impressionists used nothing but small brushes), well and good; but when it is actuated by fear, then this destroys, to some extent, the calligraphic quality, which has considerable significance in a painting. It also destroys the natural relationship between the free movement of the hand and the forms of the head being painted.

Brushes should, of course, be kept clean, and the best way to achieve this, after a sitting, is to wipe them with a rag, swill the paint out with turpentine substitute, and then wash them with soap and hot water. Dry them with a clean rag, and mould them with the fingers into their original shape. This prevents the hairs from splaying.

My own experience is that new brushes are often a little unsympathetic; but as the favourite brushes naturally wear away, I find it a useful plan to carry a new brush together with the old one, so as to get it broken in.

On the occasion when I went abroad during the war as official artist I took with me a complete set of new brushes, and I well remember the difficulty I had with the first portrait I tackled. The brushes appeared to be clumsy and unsuitable for the job in hand, and for some time the manipulation of the paint was most difficult.

Oil brushes have always long handles. The idea of this being that by grasping the brush at the end in the tips of the fingers and standing with the arm outstretched it is possible to stand quite a distance from the canvas while painting so that the effect is broader and truer. It also allows for a more vigorous and longer stroke of paint.

Gainsborough is said to have had brushes made six feet long so that he could get really back from the painting and see it continually as a whole. I don't think there is any doubt that the custom which has remained constant for such a long time for long handles to oil brushes is a good one.

PAINT

THE PALETTE I use is
Titanium white
Yellow ochre
Lemon yellow
Vermilion
Crimson alizarin
Cobalt blue
Deep ultramarine
Viridian
Raw umber

This palette has two yellows of different character, two blues of different character, and two reds of different character. The deep ultramarine and umber are useful for darks, the viridian, a powerful green, together with the umber, is useful for greys as well as cobalt, though for the inexperienced painter it would be wiser to use a green not so potent to mix with flesh colour. Terre verte would be more suitable.

For a woman's portrait I might add rose madder, as this is a much more delicate colour than crimson alizarin for the carmine in the cheeks, and occasionally I add a medium cadmium, as this increases the intensity of the yellow. Burnt sienna and light red may also be necessary, particularly in a portrait of a woman with red hair. The reason burnt sienna, light red and cadmium are only used when absolutely necessary is that nearly all oil painting tends to become too hot in colour. A real difficulty is to keep flesh colour cool. It should be remembered that most things go yellow with age, and that it is a natural and common error to translate the flesh colours into yellows and browns. The preference for crimson alizarin over the more delicate rose madder is because it has more body, and is useful for general purposes. All crimsons, however, tend to be tricky in use. Crimson alizarin goes brown if mixed with yellow ochre, *and they all have rather a lot of oil.* This question of the permanence of colours etc, should, of course, be studied; and there is no shortage of books on the subject.

Blacks are achieved by the mixtures of deep ultramarine—the only blue that is deep enough for this purpose—and raw umber. The richest blacks need a touch of crimson alizarin. The advantage of this mixture over black itself is that it is a better drier, has more body as a colour, and the variety of colour achieved when painting a black coat or a black dress is more automatic. The colours used are very much a matter of personal preference, and all students should experiment with them.

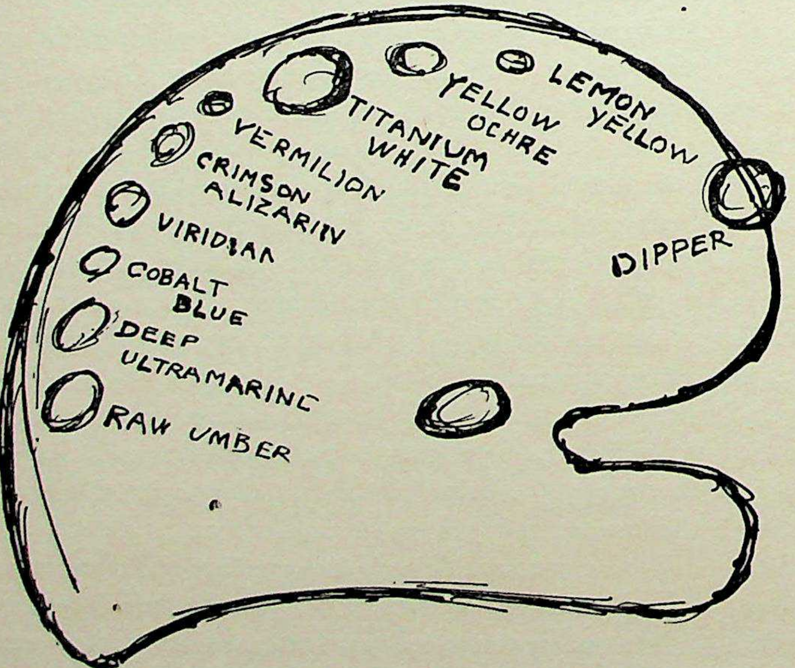
In painting flesh, colours in their pure state can rarely be used, and it is well worth while having two colours like the blue and the umber that can be used as a basic grey, though in the more delicate passages cobalt is probably a better choice than ultramarine. Terre verte by itself may prove a valuable addition for toning down the flesh colour.

To thin the paint, only turpentine is necessary. There is enough oil in artists' colours to stick the paint to the canvas, and any excess of oil darkens the paint in time. The use of linseed oil gives, however, a luscious quality to the painting itself, and many artists use it because of that. Here again, personal preference should decide, and books on methods will suggest many alternatives.

PALETTE

THE PALETTE itself should balance on the hand. The side nearest the body should have more weight than the edge on which the colours are placed. Use as large a palette as convenient, and keep it clean. It is advisable always to lay the colours out in the same order—the dark colours at one end and the light colours at the other, with white in the middle. Also get into the habit of mixing the darker tones at one end of the palette and the lighter tones at the other end. Place the colour near the edge of the palette so as to give as much available space for mixing as possible and keep the colours well away from where the arm comes. Order on the palette is helpful to order on the canvas. If, after an hour or so's painting, the palette is full of colour and it is difficult to find a clean patch on which to mix a fresh colour, either clean the palette or get a fresh one. It is remarkable how a palette clogged with paint seems to clog the mind, and how a clean palette will freshen the mind again. Always carry a rag on the palette to wipe a brush that is too full of paint.

Some artists do not carry a palette, but use a table, sometimes with the top tilted, or a piece of glass on a table. The table is generally placed close to the painting and this method allows the artist to hold brushes in both hands and even to paint with both hands.



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The painting is the thing and whether you carry a palette about with you, or use a table, it is purely a matter of personal preference.

Palettes can be made in various materials. The old idea was one made of mahogany, but plywood is just as good, or aluminium, or even plastic. Some artists prefer a white palette, but I think it is purely a matter of what one is used to.

I use the traditionally shaped palette and I have always two available, so that at the end of the sitting I can transfer the colour that still remains to the other palette and clean the one just used.

This is useful if one is painting every day, not only for economy, but paint becomes a little drier and thicker and this thicker paint is at times useful in getting a little more impasto.

The turpentine is best carried in a dipper on the edge of the palette. It should be large enough for the largest brush to pick up the turpentine, but never more than about a quarter full, otherwise it will spill over and run on to the palette and floor.

I always say that a good painter should be able to paint in his best suit and the control of the turps in the dipper is very important if one does not want to make a mess.

EASEL

IT IS usually better to stand rather than sit to paint a portrait. To move close to the sitter in order to understand perfectly some bit of form, or to get well away to see the general tone, is helpful, and this can only be done if one is standing to paint.

An easel should be chosen, then, that takes a canvas suitable for portraits—one that is tall enough to stand and paint at, at eye level. The easel should be firm, easy to move about, and (very important) give a forward tilt to the canvas, so that the paint doesn't shine as you put it on. It should be possible for the canvas to be moved up or down with little trouble. This last point is also very important, as it is much more difficult, and leads to scamping the work, if the bottom of the canvas has to be painted with the artist bending down. Physical comfort is necessary to paint any important passages, and these should always be painted at shoulder height.

It is astonishing how reluctant the artist becomes to put his palette down and readjust the canvas to the right position; but there is no doubt of the wisdom of doing this, and the little break of thought that occurs is often valuable.

How often does it occur to the painting student that the moment the continuity of thought is broken by a teacher coming round to criticize, he can at once see his mistakes, and hardly needs the instructor to tell him? The continuity of thought can also be helpfully broken by doing little necessary jobs, such as raising or lowering the canvas.

The most useful easel is the radial. It is a very old design. I have used one all my life. Every school of art in the country uses them and I should say that practically every professional artist has one or two. It has the additional advantage that it can be folded, easily carried in a car, or put away when not in use. What is known as the studio easel; one that winds up and down and perhaps tilts the canvas at the desired angle, is necessary for large work.

I find, in practice, that the radial easel carries a 36 × 28 inch canvas with ease, but anything larger than that requires a studio easel of some sort. There are many varieties of three-legged folding easels which are adequate for anything up to a 24 × 20 inch canvas. An ordinary blackboard easel is quite suitable as long as some gadget can be found to tilt the canvas forward and it is tiresome, of course, when the canvas has to be raised or lowered.

At the moment there are a few new aluminium easels which have come on to the market. They are folding easels and very light, but quite strong and are excellent to use for small canvases.

THRONE

FOR THE normal portrait it is usual to have the head of the sitter on the same level as the eye of the artist, so that if the sitter is posed in a chair, the chair must be raised fourteen to sixteen inches from the ground. A throne about this height, and big enough to carry a chair and the sitter in comfort, is necessary. As has been said before, the feeling the artist desires to put into his work controls everything he does; and the artist who would like his sitter to have an imperious look would have an even higher throne, so that the sitter would look down on him and on the eventual spectator of the finished portrait. A seeker after more humility might reverse the process. If the artist wishes to show the sitter in the surroundings of his home, then the throne would be dispensed with—the interest always dictates the proceedings.

Dispensing with the throne and placing the sitter on a chair or couch on the floor may necessitate the artist sitting also to paint. Now though I have often been insistent about the artist standing to paint a portrait and though I know most portrait painters past and present would bear me out on this, it must be remembered that there is no absolute rule: some painters prefer to sit and even claim that their best work is done sitting down because they are more relaxed and more restful. After all Renoir sat to paint a considerable number of his pictures, including portraits. It has, too, one great advantage if one paints in an ordinary room. The light on the head is generally stronger when the sitter is not raised on a throne, unless the windows are exceptionally tall ones.

The throne I have in my studio has castors so that I can turn the throne and sitter round to get the required light. If it is difficult to move the throne then to adjust the position of the sitter the position of the chair on the throne has to be moved.

The question of lighting and background follows the same principle. Diffused light or a concentrated light depends entirely on which the artist prefers. This question of lighting has many intriguing possibilities that have not been fully explored by painters. The reflection of light with mirrors is often extremely fascinating, and in the portrait of Margaret reproduced here as a demonstration, there is a mirror reflecting the light upwards from near her feet.

The use of artificial lighting can be made to work satisfactorily if sufficient care is taken over the colour problem. A proper combination of fluorescent strip lights can be an excellent substitute for daylight.

The background again is a matter of personal preference. In considering the great portrait painters of the past, it may be noticed that, inasmuch as the artist was truly interested in the character and quality of his sitter, the background tended to lose significance, and this convention has often been accepted. There is such a divergence of opinion on what is good painting that it is difficult not to be a little confused. This brings about some self-consciousness in the artist, and it is this self-consciousness that makes the choice of background difficult. This difficulty can only be solved by the artist allowing his dominating interest to have full play, and to have good sense rather than obvious good taste about secondary things, of which background is one.

One of the essential things in portrait painting is that the sitter should be content and at ease. If the throne is too small the feet might have to be tucked in which would react on the general pose or there might be some feeling of insecurity. In my experience this feeling reacts on the artist too and the job is too exacting to have any outside disturbances of this sort.

The Materials of the Artist by Max Doerner
(London, George G. Harrap)

Painting Materials: a Short Encyclopaedia
by Rutherford J. Getters and George L. Stout
(New York, Van Nostrand)

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Method

DRAWING

DRAWING IS a basic factor in portrait painting. By drawing I mean the ability to show on a flat surface the precise relation of forms to one another as intended by the artist. To-day it is almost necessary to apologize for this academic ability; but let it be made quite clear that however much one is interested in the purely expressive side, no portrait painter can go far unless his ability to draw is a conscious accomplishment. It should also be made clear that this technical knowledge is not particularly difficult to acquire. It is more a matter of sustained interest than some special talent, and closeness of observation and appreciation of true values are of far greater importance in first-class painting than the solution of any technical problem.

This technical side of drawing boils down to two very simple things—perspective and light and shade. The drawings on pages 66 and 67 illustrate all the problems, though the application of this knowledge to the greater subtleties in the head is not quite so simple. Apart from the knowledge required to draw forms in relation to one another, it is also important to have some knowledge of the basic forms of the head. The genius may short-circuit this acquisition of knowledge by instinctively knowing and appreciating the true values in the complexities of shapes in front of him; but the more normal mortal cannot escape the effort to accumulate knowledge about his subject in the hope that eventually he will sort out what is valuable and discard what is unimportant.

A drawing is not really judged on how the artist draws, but on what he sees. It is an illustration of his attitude towards life rather than an illustration of his powers of draughtsmanship. If a drawing exhibits only cleverness of draughtsmanship, then it is generally indifferent drawing; and although most artists and all students feel their appreciation is greater and more profound than their accomplishment, it can be taken for granted that the virile mind in pursuit of its vision will eventually succeed in at least grabbing the hindermost quarters and hanging on long enough to establish the fact.

In the drawings and illustrations reproduced here, I have tried to illustrate the realities of portrait work—the basic forms that in their relationship to one another, and in the quality of character they reveal, give portraits the dignity and power that raise them above the commonplace likeness. A twinkle in the eye on a map of the features is not enough. There should be some awareness on the part of the artist of the relation between the main forms of the head and the character of the sitter, even to the spiritual qualities, plus or minus as the case may be.

On this point of the relationship between form and, of course, colour and tone, and the character of the sitter, it is impossible to state any definite rule. Every adult has some knowledge of these relationships. For instance a child's head consists of very simple and smooth forms because of the simplicity of character. It is not difficult to recognize a bad-tempered person. It is expressed in the forms of the head just as a kindly person shows different characteristics. I do not believe that beauty is only skin-deep. In a really lovely person it starts from the mind. Good character can be seen through poor features and an unpleasant character can be felt even when the features appear delightful. It is possible to tell a pompous person by the way he walks, or even sits in a chair. Not only is the relationship between forms to be observed, such as the size of a nose compared to the rest of the face, but to the discerning mind there is a relationship between these forms and character.

I do not think, however, that it is the business of the artist to analyse and try to find a formula for this sort of thing. It would in my opinion produce a convention in the way that an indifferent cartoonist or caricaturist uses conventional expressions. In the first rate artist any success he may have in achieving some insight of the person he is painting and expressing it on canvas, springs from a profound interest in humanity and general wisdom.

The good portrait draughtsman draws what he sees, but his feelings dictate *what* he sees.

THE APPROACH

TO PAINT a portrait it is necessary to have a fair amount of room in which to work. It should be possible to step back some distance from the canvas so as to get a comprehensive view of both canvas and sitter, at least far enough back to see the canvas in one glance; in fact, the painting should be done to look its best at that distance.

As consistent a light as is possible for the time one is painting is important, though this is not necessarily a north light. A good sized room with a large window is just as good as a studio, maybe better. Many artists prefer side lights. Not only is it necessary to stand back occasionally from one's work, but it is an advantage to paint at arm's length. It automatically broadens one's vision. If one is close to the painting for any considerable time it is astonishing how the detail of the head will take precedence over the bigger forms and how the local colour will become over-emphasized. To get into the habit of painting as far away from the canvas as possible, even to the extent of holding the brush at the tip, is a method to be cultivated. It is, of course, necessary to strike the balance between complete control of the brush and this method of work.

It is well to mark the position of the chair on the throne, and the throne on the floor, so that the sitter will be always in the same light. It is also as well to know where to stand to view the sitter. In the case of a head and shoulders, this can be fairly close, but, in the case of a larger portrait, it is obviously necessary to be further away. Any drawing of the figure must always be done from the same position, and the place of one's feet should be marked: the easel might be moved about quite a lot. The actual painting, as a whole, should be done from the place marked. This necessitates the artist moving backwards and forwards quite a lot, but there is no escape from this. It is undoubtedly a bad habit to stand close up to the canvas all the time. If one is forced to paint in a small room, the size of the canvas should be kept small.

Of all the arts, portrait painting is unique in that the vagaries and characteristics of another human being are essentially part of the production, and these have to be considered—often with the necessity of exercising real tact and skill.

It is undoubtedly true that a large number of portraits are exceedingly grim and forbidding. The sitter may have looked like that when he was being painted, even though never in his life had anyone seen him looking so depressed or so severe. Something has to be done to keep the sitter alive. He cannot be kept on ice while the painting is being done, but should remain, as far as possible, in the normal state of liveliness. The artist must either talk himself or get someone else to talk to the sitter, or play music—something must be done, at whatever cost, if the portrait is to look like the sitter, if the corners of the mouth are not to droop, or the upper lids of the eyes are not to be obscured by sags of flesh hanging from the brows.

The combination of qualities required to make a man unique in any profession is always fascinating and interesting, and the ability to awaken the sleeping sitter into a genial alertness by some witty remark, or frighten by sheer force of personality some recalcitrant and reluctant patron of the portrait art into some semblance of his normal senses, is just one of those odd accomplishments that appear to be necessary.

DESIGN

THE FIRST thing to settle when painting a portrait is the design. The general weakness in most inexperienced artists who enjoy painting is that the impatience to start putting paint on the canvas so often results in the neglect of initial planning—of fully deciding exactly where the head should go, and what is going to happen to the rest of the figure. Design is another instrument that can add force and power to a painting, and can define still more closely what the artist has to say about his sitter, and some thought must be given to it. Even if there is only the head on the canvas, it is still very important that it should be put in exactly the right place. No painting should be done, therefore, until this question of design is settled.

Firstly, the sitter should be posed so that the lights and darks, the pattern of the figure, and the background, are satisfying to the artist, and the pose of the head and figure is right in character. A good way to decide how the figure should fill the canvas is to look at the sitter through a piece of paper that has had a hole cut in it of the same proportions as the canvas. This will certainly help to decide the position of the head, and show how the rest of the figure balances with the background.

Reproduced here are a few preliminary drawings I did for Mr J. B. Priestley's portrait. Many artists and writers on art have gone into this business of design at great length and have attempted to reduce it to its essential geometric basis which they argue is fundamental to good design and that no great picture can be painted without a knowledge of the pure science.

I disagree with this and argue that what is required, particularly in a portrait artist, is understanding of the character of the sitter and wisdom in placing him in attitudes and on surroundings that are suitable to that character. What the average student has to do is place the figure on the canvas appropriately. The space above the head must not be so great that the sitter looks as if he is slipping out of the bottom of the canvas, nor should the top of the head be too close to the frame. Let us say that good judgment is required in seeing that the amount of space round the sitter is fitting to the size of the figure.

Three of the drawings were discarded, not because the design of the spaces is far wrong, but because in the first drawing the dangling hands seem out of character, the one looking away from the spectator is too introspective, the third being too square on, makes it appear more formal, while the final choice looks comfortable, assured, compact, building up to the final assessment of character I felt justified and satisfactory.

As regards tonal relationships it would obviously be a mistake to have the lightest light somewhere on the edge of the picture. In a man's portrait the collar and shirt front may often be the lightest part of the painting, but care has to be taken that hands and cuffs are not too dominating. Again it is good sense rather than an intricate knowledge of design that indicates the head as the main interest. But always it should be remembered that some particular interest or violent urge may dictate to the artist some unusual design, some eccentricity of arrangement that still fulfils its purpose perfectly and makes an excellent picture.

On page 23 I have stressed some of the qualities of design of the Velasquez portrait illustrated in this book. The pattern is clearly satisfactory and easy to appreciate, the figure well out of centre is balanced perfectly by the fan, but it is the design of the form which is so masterly and so eminently satisfactory.

In the drawing I have shown the main planes of the form. Notice how the plane of the chest is repeated in the plane of the upper part of the skirt, how the line of the dress cutting across the breasts runs round the figure and how this form is again emphasized by the upper line of the arm and how this line shows clearly the rhythmical balance of both arms.

The skirt repeats the form of the bodice while the head, just not quite straight, helps to make the portrait less severe.

State Museum,
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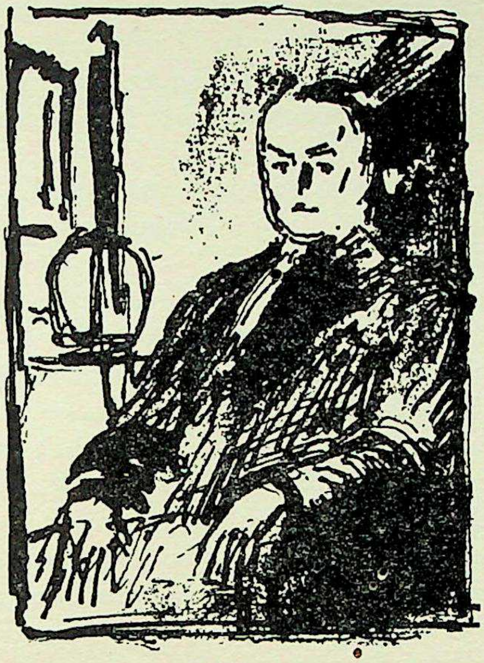
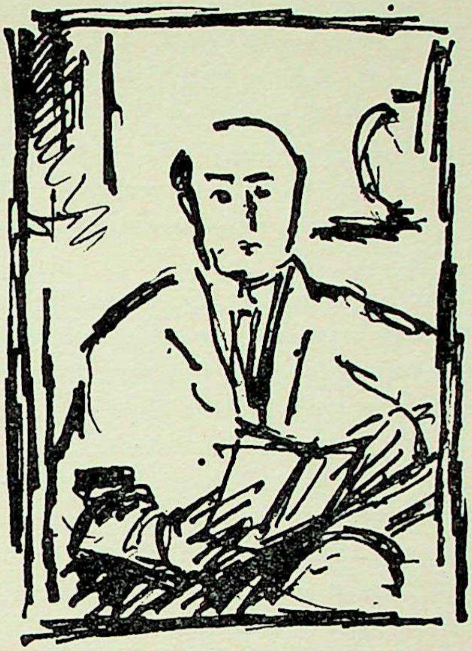
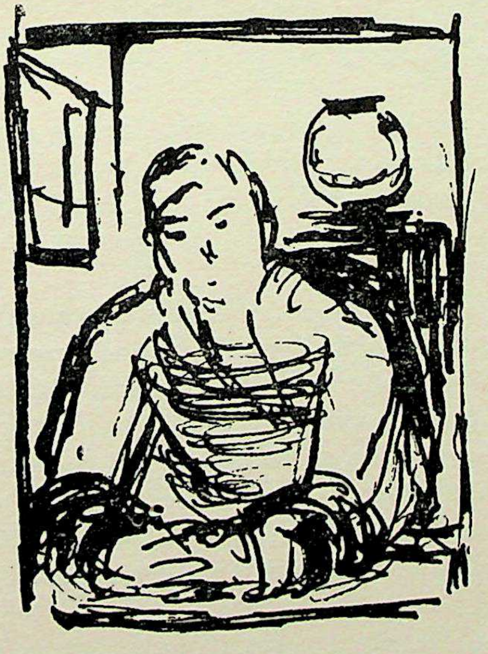
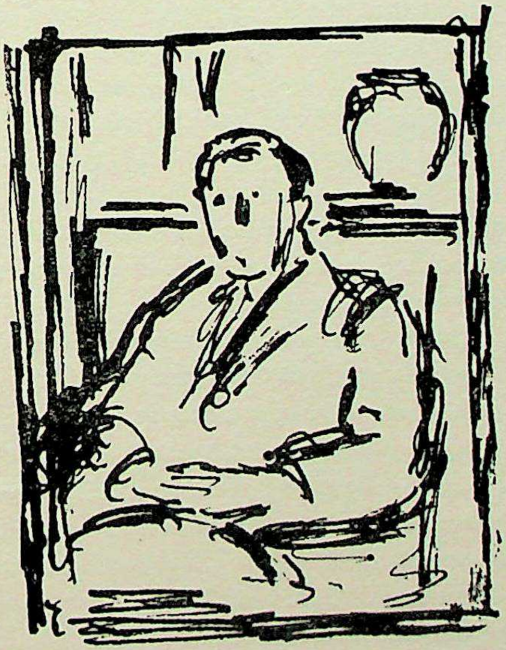








I am quite sure if Velasquez could be shown this drawing he would say he hadn't been all that conscious of designing this interplay of forms, though he would admit it was all there in the subject. Had he in fact been self-conscious about it the painting could easily have looked false, instead of being the modest simple statement which it is and which make it a masterpiece.

It is the appreciative and sensitive mind that one must try to emulate and not expect that one can get such results as this painting by rule of thumb and by following the laws of design.

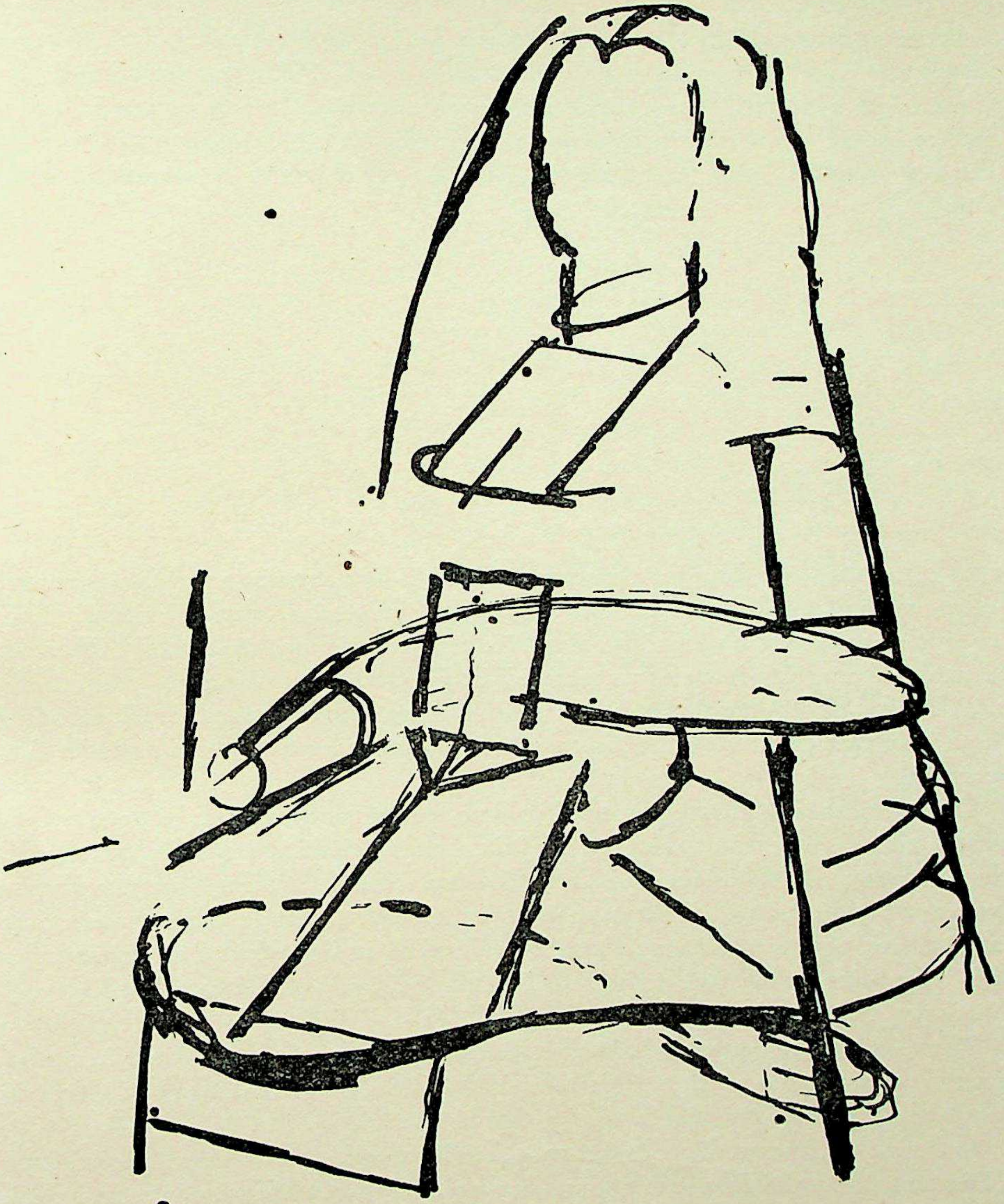
The scope for startling originality in the design of a portrait is not very great, and anything unusual in the arrangement made should spring naturally from a sincere effort to portray some quality of great importance to the artist, and not from a deliberate effort to make it look unusual or original. Any forcing of the design outside that just balance decided by acute observation and appreciation will destroy the sense of reality, the sense of rightness, essential to a good portrait. The mind of man moves only slowly forward, step by step, and only small steps at that, and the constant modern urge to be original must not distract the student from the lessons to be learnt from men who have solved at least some of the problems, or allow true imagination to be turned into mere fantasy.

The size of a head on the canvas is a debatable point, but the generally accepted attitude is to keep it just smaller than life-size. This again can be a question of outlook and of vision, but most of the great portrait painters have kept the head slightly smaller, those in women's portraits being, on the whole, smaller than those of men. The heroic size head is generally the result of the artist's desire to make his work look powerful. It is the easy, the obvious, the blatant way. The very fact that it has no subtlety is an argument against its use. The man who shouts is not always wise.

Exhibitions, with their obvious competitive value, have probably been instrumental in increasing the size of heads in portraits.

The organization of the design required on the canvas is not always easy. The only sure way is to do a small drawing and square it up on the canvas. By this means precision of design is assured. Square the canvas with the same number of squares as the drawing, and follow the lines in the first place as mechanically as possible. Go over the lines with raw umber and turpentine, which is a very quick drier.

This precision of design, then, is the first thing to master. Do not consider going on with a painting until you are entirely satisfied with the placing of the figure. It is the ruthlessness with which these separate items are tackled which will bring the ultimate reward. A well-designed canvas is inspiring, and a badly-designed one dispiriting, even though the painting might be going well. If badly-designed, the more work put into it the clearer it becomes that it is wasted effort. Every time a success has been made of design the easier it becomes. Every time it has been scamped, the greater is the effort that will be required to correct it. There is such a lot of nonsense talked about design that it is necessary to clear up the question. There is no such thing as design in itself or for itself. Design merely places first things first, second things second, and so on, giving as much force to them as is



possible or desirable. And if the artist does this, whatever his subject, then his picture will be well-designed.

For some reason design has become almost synonymous with pattern, partly because simple minds find pattern easy to grasp. But it is the design of form that gives the greatest power. The mind of the artist should be aware of the way the different masses in his picture balance one another in depth as well as in silhouette. Although portraiture limits the scope of spatial design, some study of it would be a great help to the would-be portrait painter.

DRESS

THE CHOOSING of a dress for a woman's portrait is by no means a simple matter and often requires some diplomacy. I always have a dress parade and though the sitter is asked to give her opinion as to which is her favourite dress, the artist must make the final decision as he alone knows which one he can manage in conjunction with the head.

A brilliant scarlet dress that may look wonderful in a ballroom and make a dominating note in competition with other less colourful creations, may not be at all suitable in a painting.

Bare arms, though proudly displayed at some evening party, may be better discreetly veiled when it comes to painting and the artist must use his discretion and knowledge of human nature to deal with these problems. One occasionally gets the really pretty woman who wants to be painted in jersey and jodhpurs and look as near a stable boy as she can, and the same type of woman, now middle-aged and beginning to look like the horses she adores, realizing she has made a mistake and wanting to be painted in frills and furbelows.

It is not always easy.

There is no doubt that well-designed clothes help considerably in a portrait. As can be seen in the sketch I have done of Velasquez's *Lady With a Fan* the design of the dress is obviously there to start off with.

In the late 'twenties women's dresses were designed to hide busts and hips. The majority of portraits of women done at that time suffer very badly for lack of shape in their clothes: a return to the same 'line' is certainly not going to help the portrait painter!

It is often held by artists that men's clothes are poor in design and consequently difficult to paint. I disagree with this point of view and though a dark city suit is rather severe it is very well designed and the painting of collar and tie can be exciting to do.

THE MODEL

PEOPLE OFTEN suggest that as a professional portrait painter one must have to paint a lot of very dull faces and it is difficult to make people believe that this is not true at all and that I find all comers to my studio quite interesting to paint.

It is obvious that to spend a considerable amount of one's time painting portraits it is absolutely necessary to have a real interest in people and there are some points of interest in everybody. There are some who make better pictures than others of course. Some extra charm, or strength of character, a perky liveliness, or even a profound sadness may make a portrait of more than normal interest. It is difficult to know, apart from a few exceptional cases, whose portrait is going to turn out a picture of extra quality. I am often taken by surprise myself. Occasionally I may ask somebody to sit for me because I see some definite characteristic which has great appeal. When they sit I do all I can to achieve this, but as a rule one makes up one's mind only gradually about the sitter and about the particular look which is most interesting and suitable.

When one is not experienced any movement is very disconcerting, but it is a mistake to allow the sitter to remain static for any length of time. They must be kept very alive all the time. Just now and then when you want some delicate bit of drawing you have to tell them not to move for a few moments.

To keep a sitter happy from the moment he steps into the studio till he leaves again is very important for he must look forward to coming again. Sitting should be an enjoyable experience and not a nuisance, with breaks for coffee, frequent rests, a smoke, a drink if it's the right time and the right person, all the pleasant amenities for a social visit. It is important, too, to see that the chair is comfortable and the pose easy.

Some portrait artists have music for the sitter to listen to, but in my own experience this does not work so well as one is painting a sitter who is comparatively withdrawn and I like to establish an intimacy which will eventually be passed on to the spectator of the portrait. To paint is difficult; to paint, talk and listen is more difficult.

It takes two people to do the portrait; the painter and the sitter. The sitter has to be somehow cajoled, enticed and bullied into being entirely co-operative. A reluctant sitter will hardly ever get a good portrait.

LIGHTING AND BACKGROUND

THE QUESTION of lighting and background depend again on what the artist wants to say. Rembrandt liked a small window with almost a shaft of light falling on the head, with the background in dark shadow. Vermeer, though not a portrait painter, used the ordinary side light from a window, with the light equally diffused over the wall at the back of his figures.

The play of light on the head by Velasquez is an essential part of his artistry, he also used dark backgrounds.

It can, I think, be said that all the great portrait painters are so concerned with the character and quality of the subject that the background is hardly noticed by the spectator. Even the landscape backgrounds of the eighteenth-century painters are rarely important as landscapes. They remain the background. Even today when the fashion in pictures is for some kind of all-over pattern, the sitter who has fascinated the artist dominates the canvas and the background does its job unobtrusively. I saw a canvas the other day by Augustus John where the head was in shadow and the background lighter.

I am illustrating in this book a portrait of Cécile where most of the face is in shadow and the main light on the back of the neck. There is again no law, it all depends on what interests the artist.

Regarding artificial lighting, I think one can paint quite satisfactorily in almost any kind of light, so long as there is sufficient light to mix the colours on the palette and to see the subtle differences of tone and colour on the canvas. I have painted in artificial light and I doubt if anyone would know, apart from the fact, that the subject is obviously lit by artificial light.

After all, if the subject is lit by artificial light so are the palette and canvas and thus one appears to compensate for the other. What is really important is *sufficient* light.

I know one portrait painter of repute who has gone to great lengths to reproduce daylight. He has eight bars of fluorescent lighting, a mixture of daylight and pink, and he experimented quite a lot before he arrived at this combination. He tells me it is trying to the eyes and I certainly find in it a dead quality. I feel that in the changing daylight the variety of colour gives the artist more opportunity of variety and liveliness of colour and tone, once one has mastered some of the difficulties of changing light.

Once one has been used to a thing for forty years it may be purely prejudice that forbids a change. It is almost impossible to know what is prejudice and what is true. What I do know is that when I was young the changing light was a constant source of irritation; one hour warm light, the next cold. Now I just do not notice it—or rather I enjoy it. One is inspired to use a certain colour at one moment and another for something else at other moments. A portrait is different entirely from a photograph. It is not done in a flash of time. It extends in time and just as it is built up from many moods and expressions it is also built up from various possible colours and tones. If the sitter sat as still as a wax-work, if the light was absolutely constant, I doubt if I would bother to paint it. It would be dull. The exciting thing is the choice of mood, of character, of tone, of colour. To make the portrait exist not only in space but in time.

What I often tell my sitters is that a photograph of the finished portrait will be more like them than any photograph they have ever had and to their surprise this turns out to be true.

The various kinds of trick lighting that photographers use do not prove very satisfactory to the painter. Artists have tried these things from time to time, but the results are invariably rather vulgar. What has happened is that the photographer, lacking the ability to get actual texture of surface that comes naturally to an oil painting, has had to depend on these tricks, like lighting up the hair by a spot-light, in order to increase the apparent texture. To the painter it destroys the simplicity of form and takes away from the force of the painting.

To get a satisfactory background is one of the most difficult problems facing the portrait painter. Most professional men solve it by keeping the background as simple as possible, but the portrait of Mr J. B. Priestley reproduced in this book is undoubtedly helped by an interesting background. Whatever one does the portrait is the main interest and interest in the background must not predominate. It is entirely a matter of judgment and taste.

It is a delicately balanced problem and that is why it is so difficult. The easy way is to keep it simple, almost flat, but it is pleasant and exciting to experiment, and this should be done. But don't be surprised if people say: 'I don't like your background. It's too fussy!'

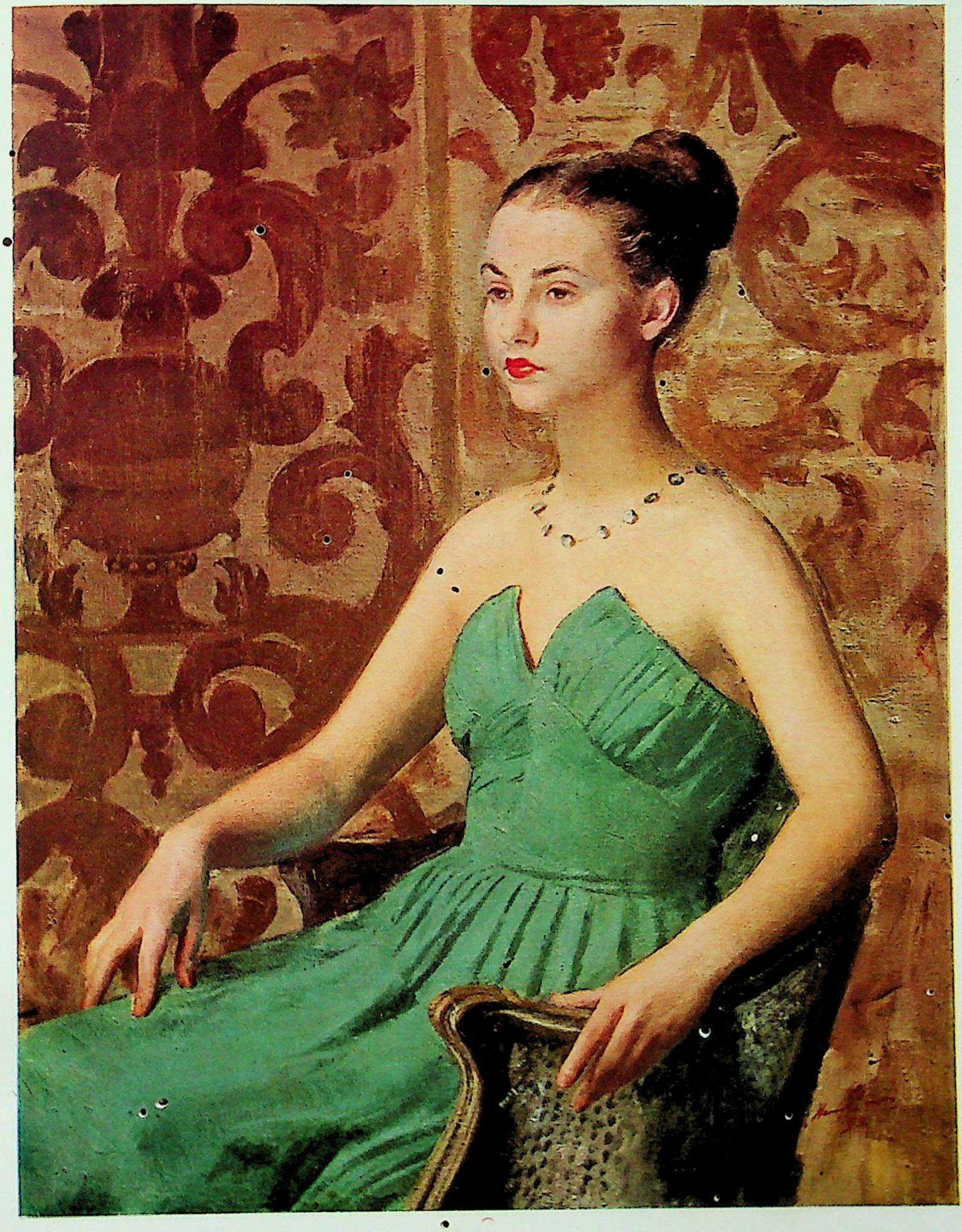
The Painter's Methods and Materials by A. P. Laurie
(London, Seeley Service)

Notes on the Technique of Painting by Hilaire Hiler
(London, Faber and Faber)

The Sittings

THIS IS to introduce Miss Margaret King-Farlow, who sat as my model for this demonstration and has been extremely patient during the process of analytically dissecting her charm by a series of drawings.

I asked her to sit because she possesses those qualities which I desired to demonstrate. The way a well-shaped head sits on a good neck; the way the neck rests on the chest, and the rhythmical flow of the forms of the arms. These features are extremely interesting to paint and, dressed as she is in a rather classic style, seated in a chair that has a classic simplicity, and with a background that might be described as classic, the picture has a unity of idea and has been most exciting and interesting to do. Nothing could be more difficult than to attempt fully to demonstrate the subtleties of tone and colour necessary to the full development of such smooth form; and the absolute concentration needed was only possible because of the interest aroused in such a perfect model.



Miss Margaret King-Farlow: 'Margaret'

INTRODUCTION

IN DISCUSSING a method of painting a portrait, I am insistent on the drawing and painting of form. It may appear to be at the expense of tone and colour relationships. I do believe that form is basic, and I am aware that the mechanics of drawing, and the knowledge of the forms of the head, can be demonstrated in a book. What cannot be taught at all, either in a book or in personal teaching, is how dominant should be the form, how dominant should be the tonal relations, how dominant should be the colour relations, and what mixture of the three essentials is right.

There is no really right way. It is a game entirely bound up with personal preferences. This difficulty of teaching colour and tonal relations reminds me of the time when I was a student under Sir William Rothenstein. He told me one day, when I was painting a figure from life, that I must watch more carefully the relations of tone and colour between the figure and the background. I well remember looking at the bit he was pointing at, and thinking that, as far as I could see, the tone and colour of the figure and the tone and colour of the background were just about right. He said 'You must *feel* their relationships better'. As I couldn't see how to alter it I did nothing about it, but some little time afterwards I was painting something similar and the revelation of what he meant dawned on me. Before, I had understood the words he used but they had meant nothing to me; now, I was *feeling* the relationships, and realizing the exact meaning of his statement.

These relationships add to the sense of reality. They have some significance that cannot be translated into words. They have to be felt, appreciated. The mind has to be aware of the significance they hold. To-day, to those interested in painting, this colour and tone relation may come a little easier. Cézanne, who spent his life demonstrating such relationships, has bequeathed his knowledge as a birthright to those who are willing to accept it.

The influence of the subject on the artist, combined with his own personal preferences will decide what combination of form, tone, and colour will be used. There is no rule. The impact of a new personality may bring about unexpected combinations, may eliminate some, or may add others. I am content to teach what can be taught.

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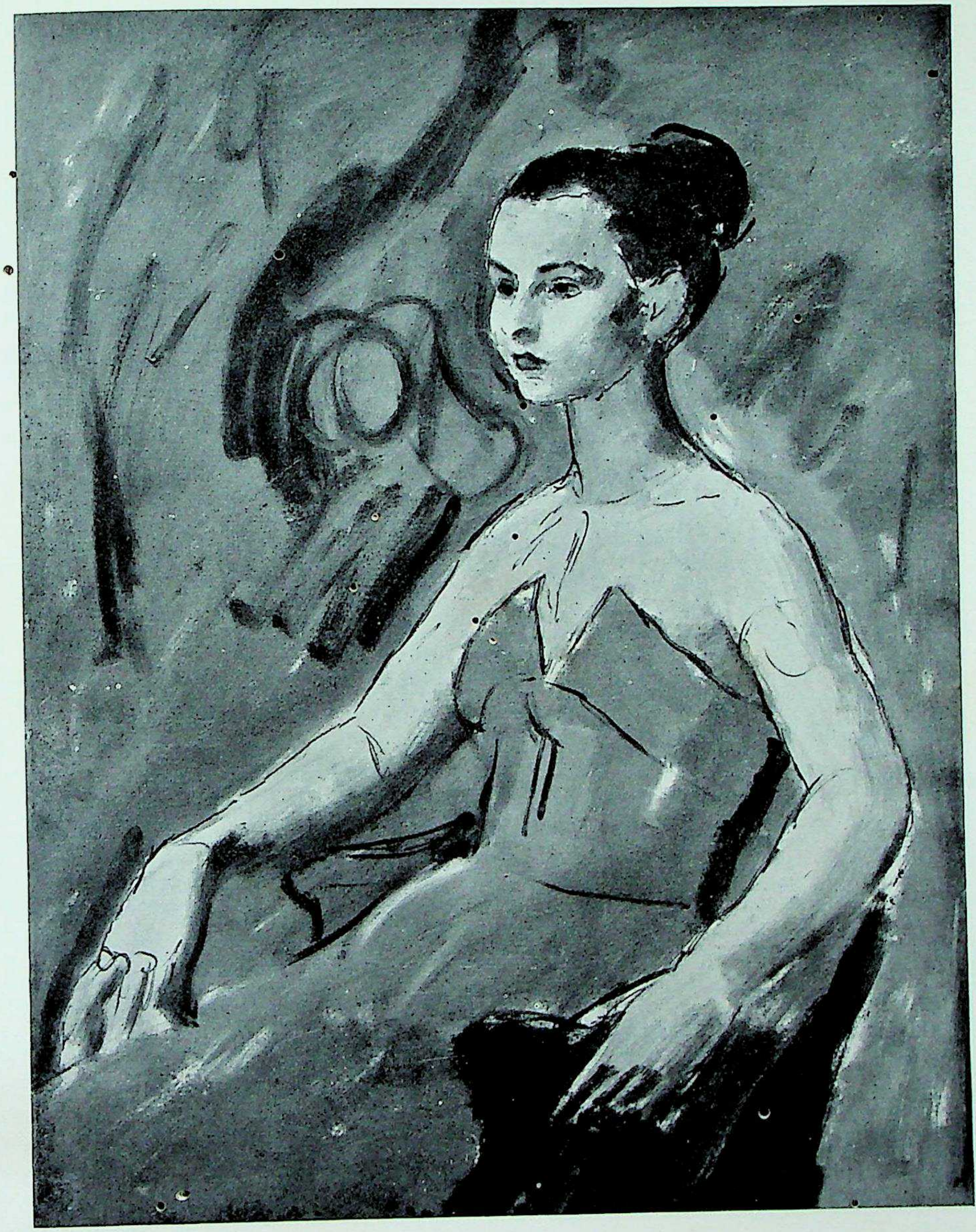
FIRST STAGE

A NEW canvas, all clean and white, has a rather forbidding look. It is a good idea to break this down by giving the canvas a tone of grey, as I mentioned earlier. A small drawing has been done, squared and put on the canvas. This is for the purpose of design, and in order to be certain of getting the portrait well placed within the rectangle. It is not advisable to complete this drawing on the canvas with charcoal and pencil, for if there is a very complete drawing before the painting is started, there is a danger that the student will just fill in the shapes with paint—rather like a map. The better plan is to draw with a brush as the painting proceeds, so that the powers of observation are kept vitally alive all the time, and the calligraphic quality of the drawing remains in the painting all the way through. It is, in fact, the ruthlessness with which the drawing of the forms is pursued that simplifies some of the difficulties of the actual manipulation of the paint. What is often thought to be talent in actual handling of a medium is often merely simplification of aim. The major difficulty in painting frequently arises from impatience, from an anxiety to get down on canvas all the interest seen and felt as quickly as possible. How many first paintings show great promise and look indeed very good? And how rarely are they developed to real maturity? Only with very unusual talent and much experience is it possible to do a portrait in a flash. There is always something that goes wrong, and further sittings are spent in correction, with the enthusiasm for the special interest of the portrait expended in the beginning. Much better to build up to the things that are fascinating, and spend the first sitting merely preparing the ground for further development. Make no effort whatever to get the portrait 'like', but get a general approximation of colour and tone, the general shape of the head and figure. It should be an underpainting, little more than another ground on the canvas, and be satisfied if it is a better starting-point to a further sitting than the blank canvas was. It is an advantage if the features suggested are in the right place, so that the next sitting will be a development and not a correction. Draw on it with a small sable or the point of a knife in order to achieve this, but on no account over-paint. The really important thing is that the surface of the canvas at the end of the first sitting should, when dry, be a lovely surface to paint on. Not doing too much at a time, the curbing of that impatience to get on with it and finish it—these are the secrets of keeping the canvas in a condition for further painting. Once a canvas gets clogged with paint (and anybody who has attempted oil painting will know how easy it is for that to happen), it is almost impossible to go on. Do not be frightened of using a palette knife to remove too thick a layer of paint, or paint that is in the wrong tone or in the wrong place. One of the advantages of having a grey undercoating is that if bits of the canvas are showing here and there they do not look so much out of place as they would if they were white, and they can be more easily ignored; and what is more important is that it is easier to judge the right tone or colour on a grey undercoating than on a dead white surface. It is astonishing how dark a light flesh tone looks on a fresh white surface; and even on a grey undercoating it needs a little experience to put the colours and tones down boldly, and to remain confident that eventually they will look all right (do not be nervous of using turpentine to thin the colours at this stage). Because of this difficulty it is wise in the first sitting to get in the background—indeed to cover the whole surface of the canvas as quickly as possible, so that the relationship of the darks, half-tones and lights can be judged. Apart from the necessity of judging the relationships of colour and tone, it is a mistake to leave the background and dress only partly painted, as it is a hindrance to the general unity of the picture. It should never be necessary to tidy up a picture. It will tidy itself up as it goes along if little points like these are attended to at the proper time. When the sitting is over, spend some time looking carefully over the surface of the painting, and try to imagine how it will feel to your brush on the next sitting. Remove with a palette knife any ridges of paint that may get in the way of further painting. If the paint is a little too thick in parts and the use of the knife may make it too slippery, it is a good idea to blot it with newspaper, which will remove the surface paint and leave a slightly rough surface.

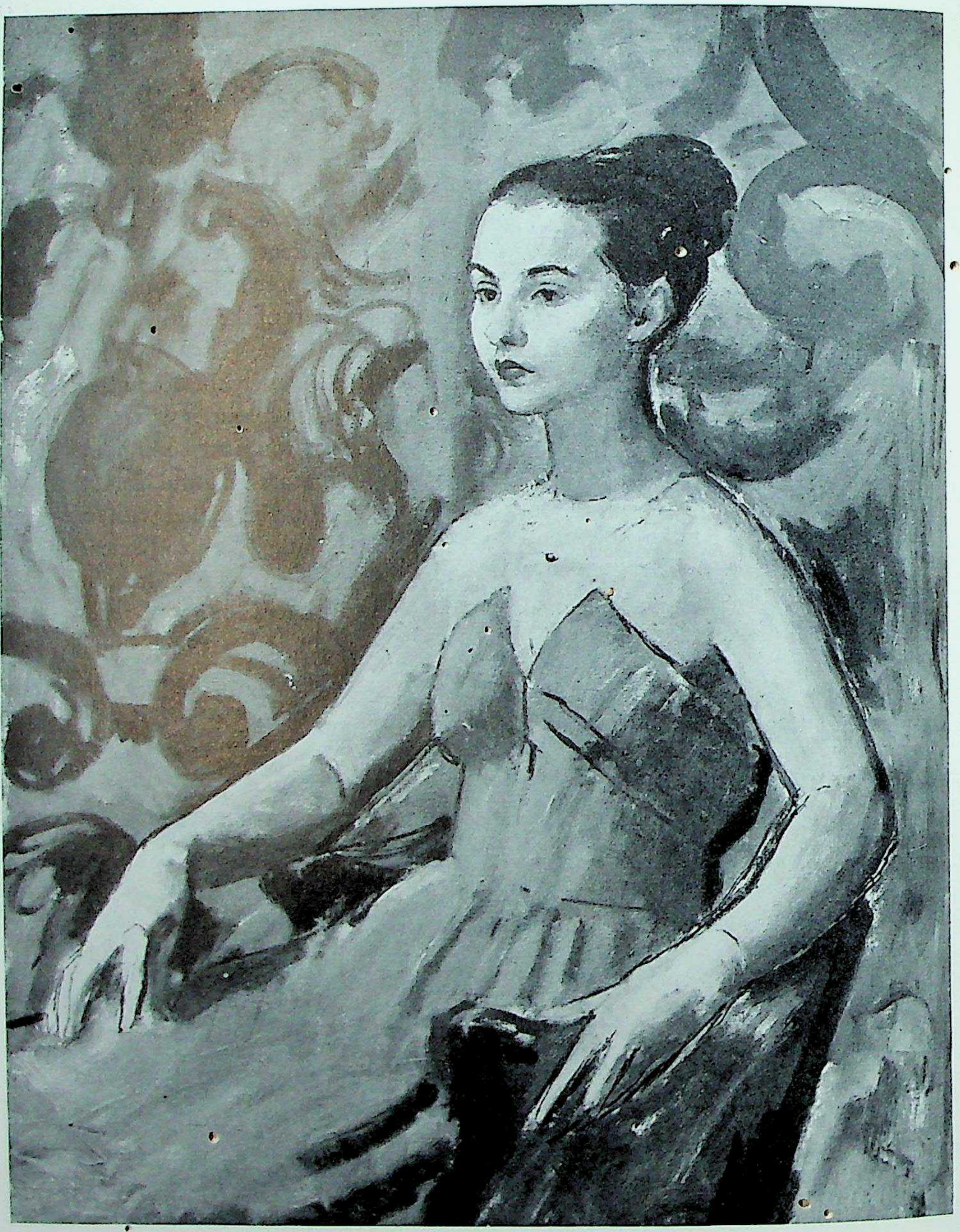
Looking at the reproduction of the first sitting, done to illustrate the process, it will be seen that the whole canvas has been filled in, and though there are a few bits of the original surface left, they do not interfere too much with the general look of the painting.

It is clearly an underpainting, there being no effort whatever to complete any part of the picture. The lines were drawn in towards the end of the sitting in order to give a little more definition which would be useful for the next painting. After an hour and a half's concentrated effort, it is always a little difficult to be aware of mistakes, as not only is the brain tired, but the eye has got used to them; so there is not much use in looking for errors in the painting immediately after the sitting. The next day the mistakes will be obvious, and then is the time to consider what is wrong with the first sitting, and to consider ways and means of putting it right in the next.

In this portrait, the first thing I noticed on seeing it the next day was that the head was thrust too far forward on the neck, giving a little awkwardness to the pose, and destroying something of that calm serenity which is a characteristic of Margaret. It will be seen how this fault gets corrected in later sittings.



Margaret: FIRST STAGE



Margaret: SECOND STAGE

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SECOND STAGE

THIS IS the moment when some accurate drawing must be attempted, and it is, in my opinion, wise to fix some spot from which the rest of the head will develop. If things go wrong, then it is possible to return to that spot and reconsider the drawing. It is so easy to wander about the head here and there and then find the different parts do not fit. Centrally placed and suitable for position and drawing is a piece of the nose between the eyes. Using the finest sable, draw with delicate lines the width of this part of the nose, place the forms of the eye, using larger brushes to put in the colours and tone. The whole idea of the second sitting is to discover the correct drawing, to place accurately the dominant features, and to understand and draw the main form. By using tone and colour, it will begin to look a little like a painting; but as the artist is aware that further sittings are coming, no enthusiasm should be wasted on some lovely highlight or some rather beautiful quality in tone. Just see that their placing is right. Think of the next sitting, and in dealing with half-tones, which are always difficult to paint separately, make them rather dark and extensive. It is easier in manipulation to paint the lights and the darks into the half-tones; at no time strain the manipulation. If the paint is getting a little difficult to manage owing to repeated corrections, let it go and get on with some other parts. When it is dry it may well be found possible to do with a touch or so what was so difficult when it was wet. What can and often does happen when the paint is wet and fairly thick, and a correction of colour or tone has to be made, is that the new correct colour on the brush mixes with the wrong colour on the canvas, and the result is not decisive. Hence the use of a palette knife to remove the wrong colour or tone before the right colour or tone is applied.

The idea of not doing too much at a time is undoubtedly a help in overcoming some of the difficulties of managing paint, and, by leaving these first two stages obviously incomplete, interest will be maintained over many sittings. It is, oddly enough, more difficult to work on a painting that is almost right than on a painting that clearly demands repainting.

The length of a sitting should be determined by the time it takes to go over the whole head, and, of course, the endurance of the artist. People vary much in this respect, but it is more than likely that the utter concentration demanded in painting a head will exhaust the brain after an hour and a half, even with a few rests. There is no mistaking the arrival of this stage, as it becomes difficult to mix exactly the right colour, and real precision gives way to clumsy statement. It is no use going on when this happens. A rest and some food is indicated. Naturally, the inexperienced artist will take longer over each stage, but it is better if the whole head can be fairly well drawn with tone and colour in this sitting. Use the background colour to define the outline of the head, but do not get into the habit of painting only an inch or so of the background. Always, when using background colours, unite them to the rest of the background, so that at the end of the sitting the background as a whole has had a further coat of paint. If the portrait is very large, this is not always possible, but in any case whatever background *is* painted should be united with the rest. The same with the painting of the dress. By doing this the portrait will always look more complete after each sitting, and unity will grow naturally. If the paints used are those supplied by artists' colourmen, there is little need of a medium, but it is wise to keep the dark paint rather thin, and a little turpentine in these places will be wise. The paints vary themselves from time to time, and temperature has some effect on them, too; so it does require a little experience to know what consistency of paint to use. It should never be so thick as to drag off the brush. Most students do not mix enough colour, and much time is wasted trying to make a mark on the canvas with an almost dry brush. Backgrounds and large areas are too often painted with too small a brush and too little paint.

In the first sitting there is no reason why the larger areas should not be painted rather thinly with plenty of turpentine mixed with the paint. When dealing with the tones and colours of the head, there should always be enough paint on the brush to make the exact length of stroke desired. If, as is often necessary, small brushes are needed, mix up the paint with a larger brush, as this ensures that there will be plenty of paint for the small brush to pick up. The drawing of fine lines generally demands a little medium. At the end of the sitting again go over the painting with a knife, removing any ridges of paint, and think once more about the surface in relation to the next sitting. It is surprising how easy it is to remove surface paint without interfering with the general look of what has been done. It is, after all, only an underpainting—its virtue depends on how correct the drawing is, on the fact that the colours and tones are a closer approach than what was there before, and on the quality of the surface to take further development.

The second reproduction deals with two sittings, one spent entirely on the head and neck, and the other on the figure, so it can be considered as the second stage.

In the head it will be seen that the features are now more balanced than in the first painting, and the main planes of the head itself are being more defined. The outline of the cheek and forehead has been considered in relation to the shadows on the nearer side of the head; the eyes, without being finished in any way, are clearly fixed in position; the nose, mouth and chin are well defined. The ear is a little more definite, and there is a feeling of more surface texture with the added paint. The lines of drawing are disappearing, but other and more delicate bits of drawing are showing, such as the lines of the hair from the temple to the ear, and the line of the chin and neck.

The painting of the line of the hair on the forehead has been more carefully observed, and the light on the front of the hair is beginning to suggest the continuity of form from the forehead to the back of the head.

The background is taking its place along with the head, and the tonal and colour relations are being more carefully observed.

The likeness is growing, but only growing; the painting still remains an underpainting.

No part of the head is complete, but is now sufficiently accurate in the placing of the main forms to develop, with the assurance that no major corrections will be necessary.

The third sitting on the second stage of the figure itself has been carried out with the same idea. It still remains a drawing, but it is more accurate, not only in outline, but also in the consciousness of the surface of the form. The rhythmical flow of the arms is beginning to be appreciated, and the hands are a little more settled in position. The drawing of the outline with a fine sable is still there, but in some places the shadows are taking the place of outline. The form of the dress is taken a stage further, and the background has been developed sufficiently to be in keeping with the amount of work done on the figure itself. This idea of keeping the picture as a unit the whole way through its growth can be seen fairly clearly in the reproduction, and the inexperienced artist should fight the tendency to spend all his time on just the interesting details, and to paint only the bit of background which is in immediate contact.

THIRD STAGE

THIS REPRODUCTION represents two more sittings—one on the head and one on the figure.

This is the stage when real completeness should be attempted, and on some heads it might be the final painting. It is difficult to say why in some portraits it takes only three sittings to complete the head, while in others it may take five, or even six. Probably it is easier to grasp the quality of character in some people than in others, in which case the drawing offers fewer difficulties and fewer subtleties.

One of the things a professional portrait painter must be able to do is to start immediately with real constructive painting. The first stroke of the brush should be a more correct statement than what was on the canvas before. One of the real difficulties encountered in developing a portrait systematically, which prevents the artist from being constructive from the first brush stroke, is the temptation to make complete alterations in colour or tone at each stage. It so often happens that the student finds the painting on his second sitting to be much too yellow, or much too cool, or too light, or too dark, and then the sitting is spent trying to correct this; and what generally happens is that the painting, when viewed at the beginning of the next sitting, has been taken too far in the opposite direction. And so it goes on, with no real development taking place.

To avoid this, great care should be taken, particularly in the second sitting, to get the approximate tone and colour right. A definite decision should be made at that stage (if it was not made at the beginning) as to what is eventually wanted, and this decision must be accepted for subsequent sittings.

Having decided, then, that the third stage is a development of the second, it is a useful habit to mix a few of the main tones and colours before the sitting, to enable a brushful of colour to be applied to the appropriate place without any apparent change; so that when the painting is started with the sitter there, the colours on the palette can be altered that fraction necessary to make truer statement. That is, the new painting should be a development of the old, and not painted in a completely different key.

If the previous sitting has been well done, the fresh paint in the third stage should not look out of place, and it is, of course, easier to develop the painting if the second stage is being used as a guide, rather than a point of departure.

In the painting of Margaret, this third stage was started on the right eye, the drawing and colour being more accurately stated. The process continued to the left eye, the eyebrows, and then the forehead and the line of the hair. It is surprising how gently the colour and tone of the forehead can melt into the colour and tone of the hair. If this line is not done with delicacy the hair can look very much like a wig, and it is as well to paint it first in an intermediate tone, and then run the light of the forehead into it on one side, and the dark of the hair on the other. It has to be precise in shape, and yet soft.

It can be seen how the parting of the hair helps the drawing of the skull. The line of the hair down the temple has been softened, yet its direction and shape are firmer than in the second sitting.

Coming down the head, the drawing of the nose was refined, and the two cheeks, together with the shadow on the jawbone, were done as one piece of form. It can be seen that the shadows on the cheekbone and the line of the jaw are fairly well settled in shape. The difficulty of really deciding the exact shape of a shadow or half-tone can only be solved if knowledge of how it *should* work, given that piece of form in that particular light, is checked by the closest observation. Without this knowledge it is almost impossible to say where a half-tone or shadow begins or ends.

The radiance of the flesh is now being reached, the light tones being higher in key than in the previous sitting. The ear is taken a little further, and the relationship of the background to the head more considered.

As it was clear that the head was not finished, it was carefully gone over with a palette knife, so that the surface would be good to paint on the next time.

The neck, shoulders and arms occupied another sitting, and it will be seen how the form is a little more advanced, and the drawing of the shapes more clear.

Knowing that such a large area as this could not possibly be completed in this sitting the painting was kept as an underpainting, with one eye on the surface of the canvas. The dress and the background are pushed a little further to keep in touch with the growing advance of the head and figure.

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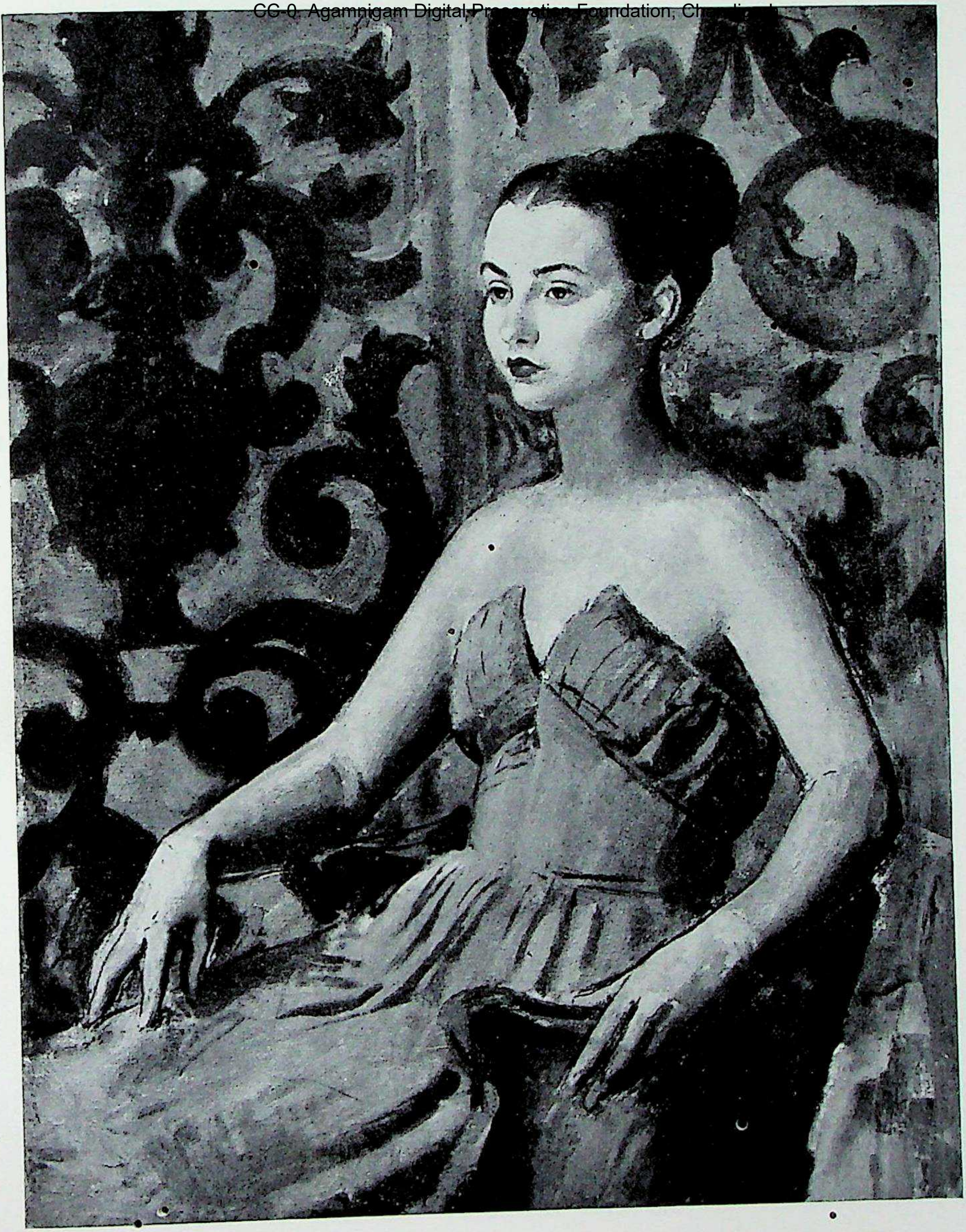
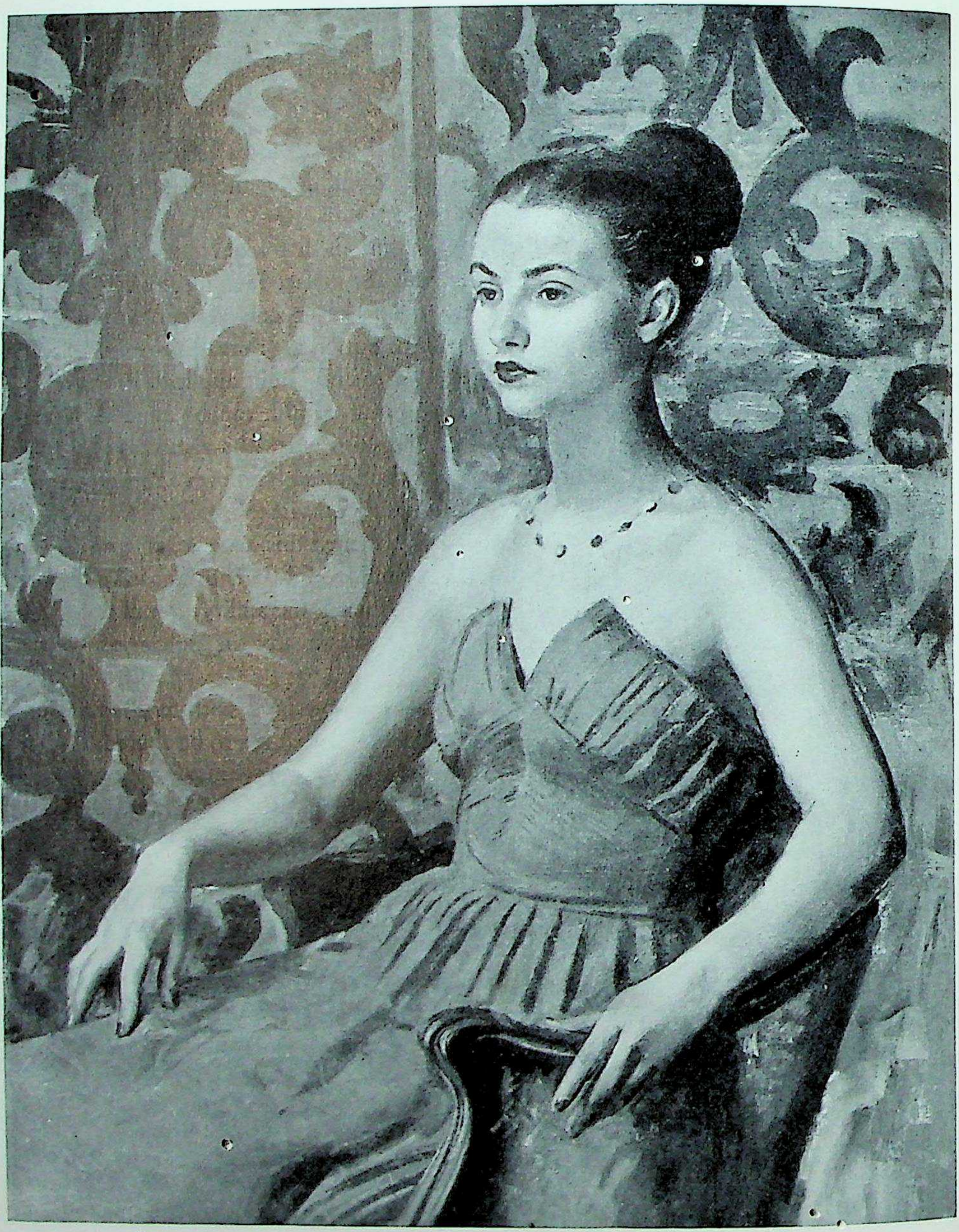


Margaret: THIRD STAGE



Margaret: FOURTH STAGE

FOURTH STAGE

THIS REPRODUCTION represents a further sitting on the head, and a very long sitting for the shoulders, arms and dress, and includes a little painting on the background, done when Margaret was not there.

What often happens, when oil is not used as a medium, is that when the paint is dry the oil in the paint is absorbed by the underpainting, and the surface loses its gloss. When the surface has gone flat, then the tones—particularly the darks—become lower in value than when they were painted, and before fresh paint can be put on the canvas the original tones must be revived. This can be done in several ways: linseed oil can be applied in a thin coat; emulsion can be used to dilute the oil; or a retouching varnish can be applied. In this portrait retouching varnish has been used on the occasions when the paint has gone flat. It has the advantage of drying within a few minutes, but, though it never appears to affect the paint in any other way than the desired one, it is no doubt wise to use as little as possible.

The fairly obvious difficulty when the painting has reached this stage arises from fear of spoiling what has already been done, and the artist tends to fiddle with it, rather than to repaint boldly. This fear can only be overcome by acquiring the ability to mix tones and colours so that they exactly match the tones and colours already on the canvas, as was explained in stage three.

Although it may not be necessary to go all over the whole head with fresh paint, it is almost impossible to confine the painting to just the local bit that has to be altered.

Of course, no major change, either in form or tone or colour—only the more subtle things, the delicate adjustments—should have to be done by this time. There should by now be no doubt as to what has to be done to make the portrait as perfect as possible; and if the mind is clear on this point, then the manipulation of the paint will not be so difficult. Confusion in the mind will lead to confusion on the canvas, and it is well to take plenty of time deciding exactly what has to be done. To get these decisions really well organized, it is quite a good idea to make a list of the alterations that have to be made.

One of the difficulties of teaching is to give that emphasis to important points, so that the student does actually recognize their importance, and this point of knowing precisely what has to be done is, maybe, the most valuable. It is the crux of the situation; and though it may appear fairly obvious, and a little unnecessary to flog the idea to the extent it is being done here, every experienced teacher knows that it is lack of real thought, lack of absolute decisions, that prevents the student from getting what he wants.

In this portrait of Margaret there were minor adjustments on the eyes; the far plane of the forehead required more definition; the colour of the forehead was a little too cool; the dark of the hair was a little too empty, it needed more modelling; the lights in the hair had to be put in; minor adjustments to the nose and mouth had to be made, as well as some serious painting on the cheek, jaw and neck. Here there had to be more delicacy in the half-tone; the shapes of the shadows from the chin to the ear were too coarse in the third stage, and the perfection of the shape of the neck had not been fully realized. All this part of the head, and the neck itself, was completely repainted. This cannot be done if one does not use the underpainting firstly as a help to making up one's mind as to what exactly is required, and secondly as a guide to the tone and colour to be used.

In the sitting on the figure the start was made on the right shoulder, extended across the chest, and then continued down the right arm, making every effort to get it as right as possible. The left shoulder and arm were next tackled, painting the dress as it came up against the chest, and the left hand.

The background was used, of course, in painting the edges of the form. The necklace was carefully drawn, and it is a useful decoration, as it helps to define the surface of the form. This sitting lasted from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon, and the form is much more clearly defined than it was in the third stage: nevertheless it required another long sitting to make the refinements needed to bring it up to the look of the head.

The chair and the background were worked on a little next day. This was probably not a wise thing to do, and it would have been a better plan to paint the background with the eye still on the sitter.

The background immediately behind the back of the head, having been painted along with the head, is more correct than it would otherwise have been; but the background on the left hand side of the picture does, in this stage, look as if the eye was focused on that alone while it was being painted, which, of course, it was; and it was clear that some adjustment would have to be made in the final stage. It is, however, a mistake to keep the background quiet and gentle in order to give the portrait more apparent vitality. If the background is fairly lively, the painting of the figure in front of it demands more vigour.

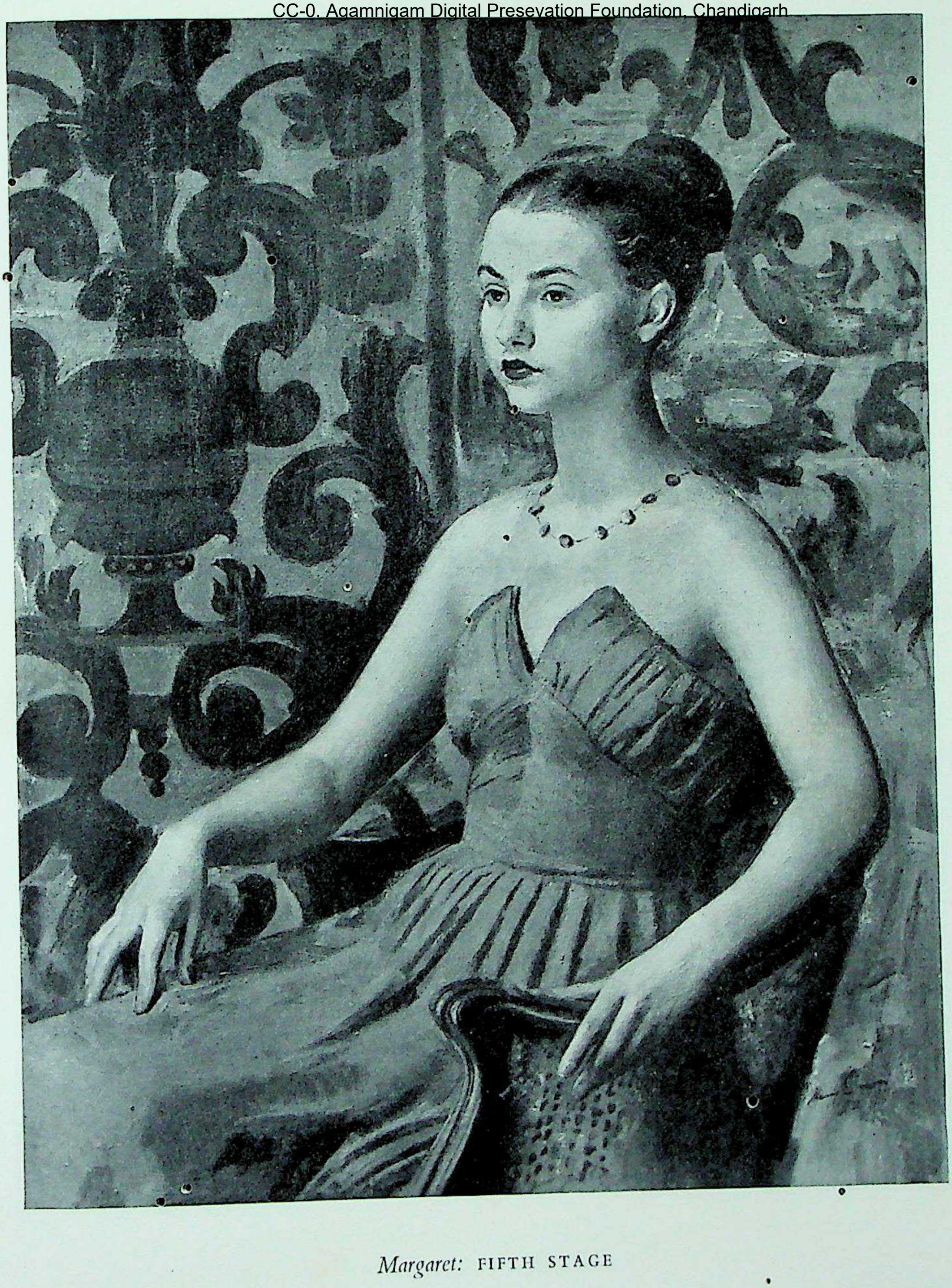
When looking at Margaret on the throne there is no doubt of the vigour of the form, and it would take a display of fireworks in the background to distract one's attention from the figure itself. It is more a matter of focus than of keeping the background quiet.

FIFTH STAGE

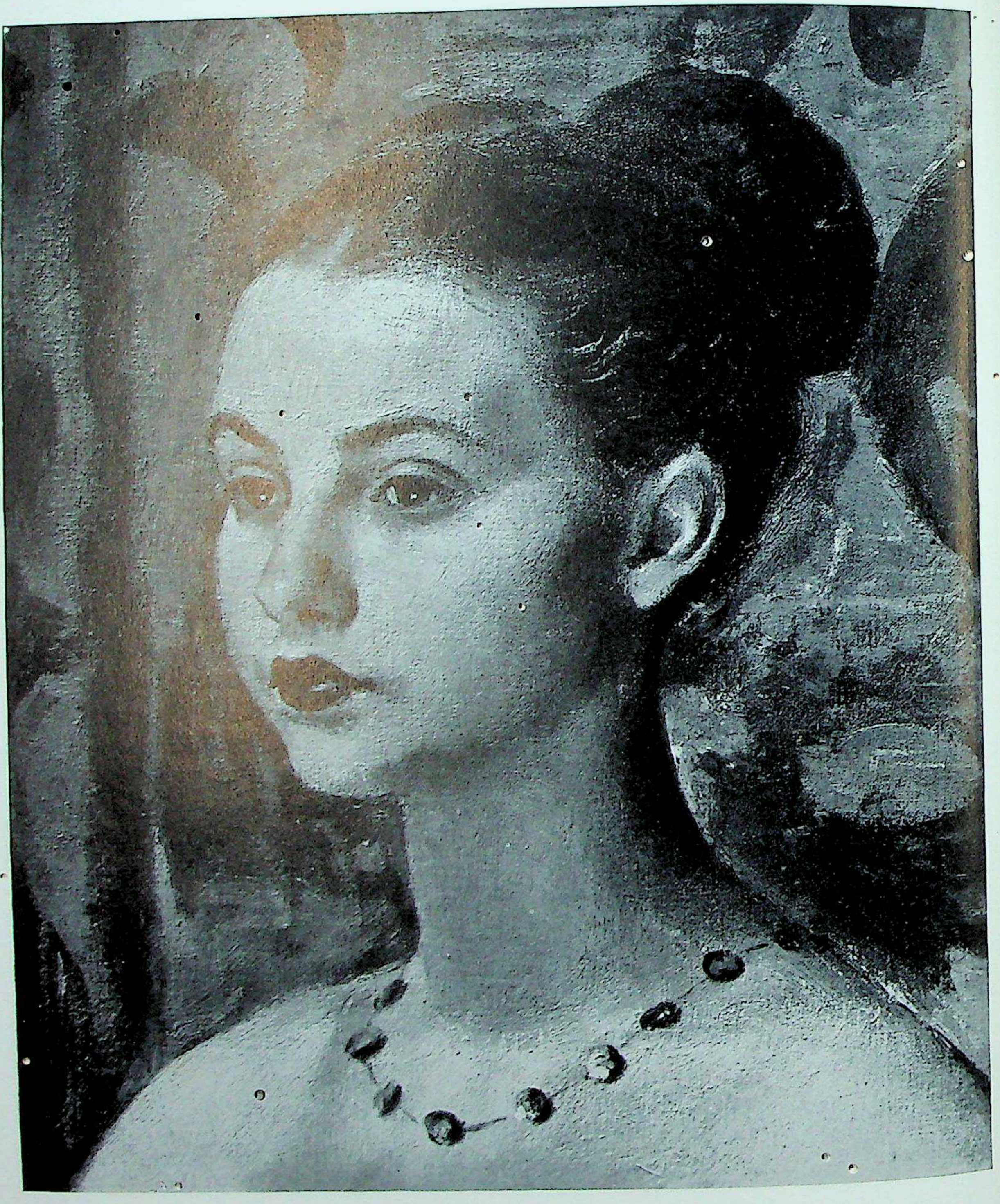
AS a portrait gets nearer to completion, it does require more courage to work on it with boldness. The fear of not being bold enough will be overcome as the ability to mix precisely the colour and tone desired is mastered, and as the knowledge of what one wants becomes more clear.

In a painting such as the one done for demonstration, where the tones colours of the flesh are extremely subtle, it always appears impossible to reach this subtlety quickly. However delicately the tones are painted in relation to one another, the next sitting reveals them as merely a coarse approximation, and there is no end to the possibilities of refinement.

LUCKNOW.



Margaret: FIFTH STAGE



Margaret: DETAIL

There is obvious danger in taking the refinement too far, thus losing the vitality of the form, and the artist must make his own decision on this point. In this particular portrait the painting was done with the idea of taking it as far as possible, thus making it a more useful demonstration than it would have been as a sketch portrait, as more difficulties have been revealed than would have occurred in a quick character study.

In this sitting, there was very little work to be done on the head. The hair was a little black, and the form at the back of the head was not clear, so a few touches of lighter colour were flicked over the dark; but there was no serious repainting—the ear was refined a little; some of the darks looked a little too harsh, and a little drawing was done to the nose. The front part of the neck was lightened, and the dark line at the back of the neck was given more variety.

Practically the whole of the shoulders and arms were repainted, as the half-tones were not gentle enough. This was done, as was explained in earlier sittings, by mixing up the tone and colour already on the canvas, and by using those tones and colours as a guide to the fresh paint. When it comes down to real delicacy of tone, it is imperative that one should be continually seeing the canvas from a distance, and there is plenty of exercise in walking forwards and backwards to and from the canvas. It does appear to be impossible to judge such tones from close up to the canvas, and the habit of some students of sitting on stools up against the painting is a bad one.

It is often made a little easier to manipulate the paint in this stage if a little oil is used. Very stiff paint would add considerably to the difficulties.

Many artists, at the end of a day's painting, remove the clean paint from the palette with a palette knife, and put it on another one for the next day's painting; and after a day or two the paint may become a little too stiff to work comfortably. So a little care is needed to see that the paint which goes on the canvas is of the consistency desired, and not necessarily as it is in the blobs of colour on the palette. This seems an obvious thing to do, but experience shows that the consistency of the paint used is not always given enough attention.

A few touches were given to the dress, and the drawing of the lap was made more obvious; the tones of the lights in the hands were repainted, and small refinements were made in the drawing of the fingers. Having gone over all the points noted before the sitting starts, it is wise to put the brushes down and say finish. There is a temptation to go on and on, touching up bits here and there, but if the main plan first decided on is achieved, then whatever small imperfections there may be are better left.

This difficulty of knowing when the job is done does seem to become easier as experience grows; but there are many tales of dealers hanging about artists' studios and taking a picture off the easel and away before the artist has had a chance to finish it, and (according to the dealer) spoil it.

What the artist should be, is utterly singleminded towards the idea he started with, and when that idea is realized the picture is finished. Compromise is the ruin of many good ideas, but compromise can be kept at bay if there is sufficient faith in what one wants to do.

The good artist must have faith.

This portrait of Mrs Bradford is very different in feeling from the one of Margaret.

Here, an attempt was made to paint the lively character of the sitter, and to do this the handling of the paint had to remain lively and vital to the last stroke. It is not that the relationships of form have been less observed, but that the emphasis has changed. The shape of the skull and neck is still there, but the things seen at first glance are the dark eyes, the dark hair, the tonal and colour relationship. The form of the figure is not neglected, but the stripes of the dress take precedence.

This portrait was chosen as it is so much in contrast with the one of Margaret, and illustrates how difficult it is to lay down any law regarding the dominant interests in portrait painting. If one artist's work can show such different interests, it is obvious that artists in general will have divergent views.

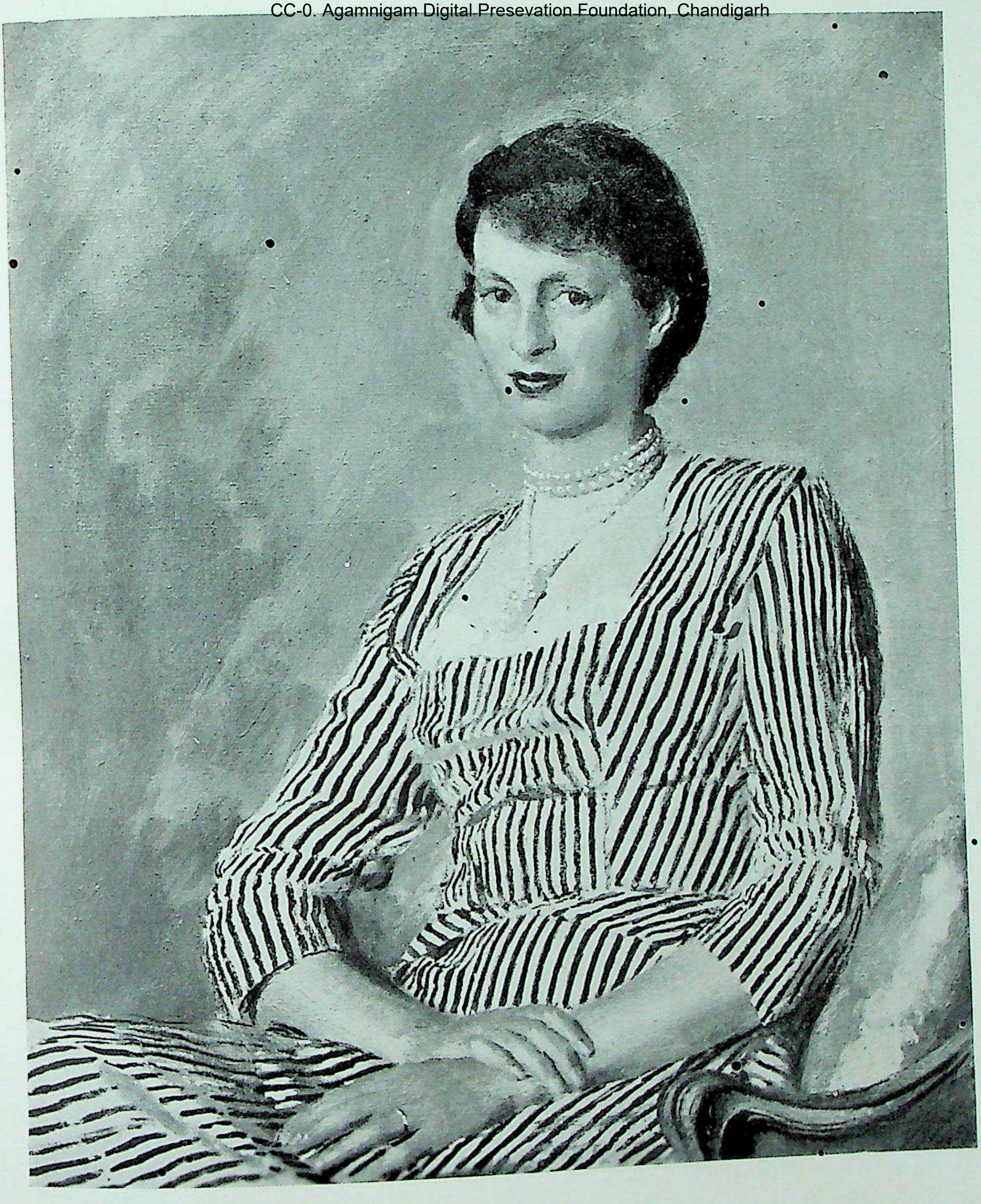
It is fairly obvious that a portrait such as this does not want lighting in some dramatic way, or a strong patterned background.

The actual painting was done by a method similar to that already described, the head being completed in three sittings. The stripes of the dress were drawn in on the ground colour of the dress when it was dry, and was done rather freely, to be in keeping with the head.

This is not a large portrait; but if a complicated patterned dress had to be painted, and the artist felt that it was necessary to get all the detail, it would be as well to use a lay figure, so that the dress could be undisturbed for several days.

Occasionally, with ceremonial dress, it may be necessary to use a lay figure, but the lay figure is not the ideal model for the portrait painter. It is on the whole better to take one's chance of never getting folds back into the same position, thus having the painting a little rough, than to rely on the lay figure and bring a suggestion of still life into the portrait.

Human beings never remain perfectly still, and it is well if this can be conveyed in a portrait. It is also a good thing when the artist's talent is fully extended, and his work does not degenerate into a mere rule of thumb.



HENRY CARR *Mrs Bradford*

MALE PORTRAITS

I AM often asked if men are easier to paint than women. It is a question which cannot be answered with a straight 'yes' or 'no'. There are a few artists who would rather paint women than men and make a better job of their female portraits. On looking back over the work of the great portrait painters of the past, I think it can be maintained that portraits of women are as successful as those of men.

An artist like Gainsborough, whom we generally associate in our minds with a special gift for charm, grace and delicacy in his portraits of women, is, nevertheless, just as successful when painting men. His reputation as a great artist would stand equally firm if none of his female portraits had survived.

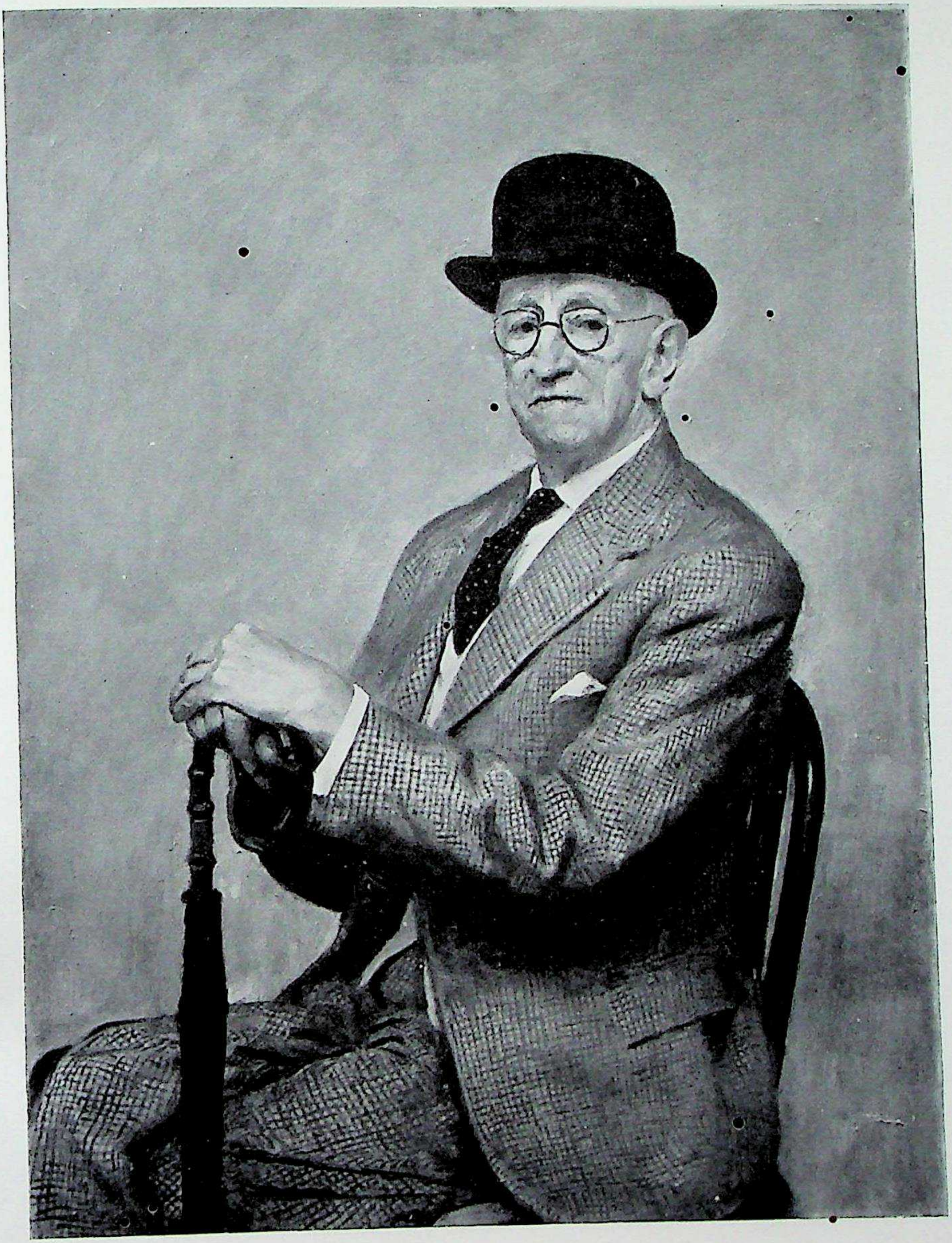
Rembrandt's powerful and profound developing of the full character of his sitters applies to either sex. The conclusion reached from these observations is, that the really great portrait painter is interested in humanity as a whole and can be just as appreciative of feminine beauty as of masculine severity and has achieved the technical accomplishment to get the results he requires.

If an artist does not attain this accomplishment, the lack of delicacy and refinement in a woman's portrait is perhaps more noticeable than similar faults in a man's portrait. It therefore appears to be easier to paint a man than a woman, and there are apparently more successful men's portraits than women's portraits.

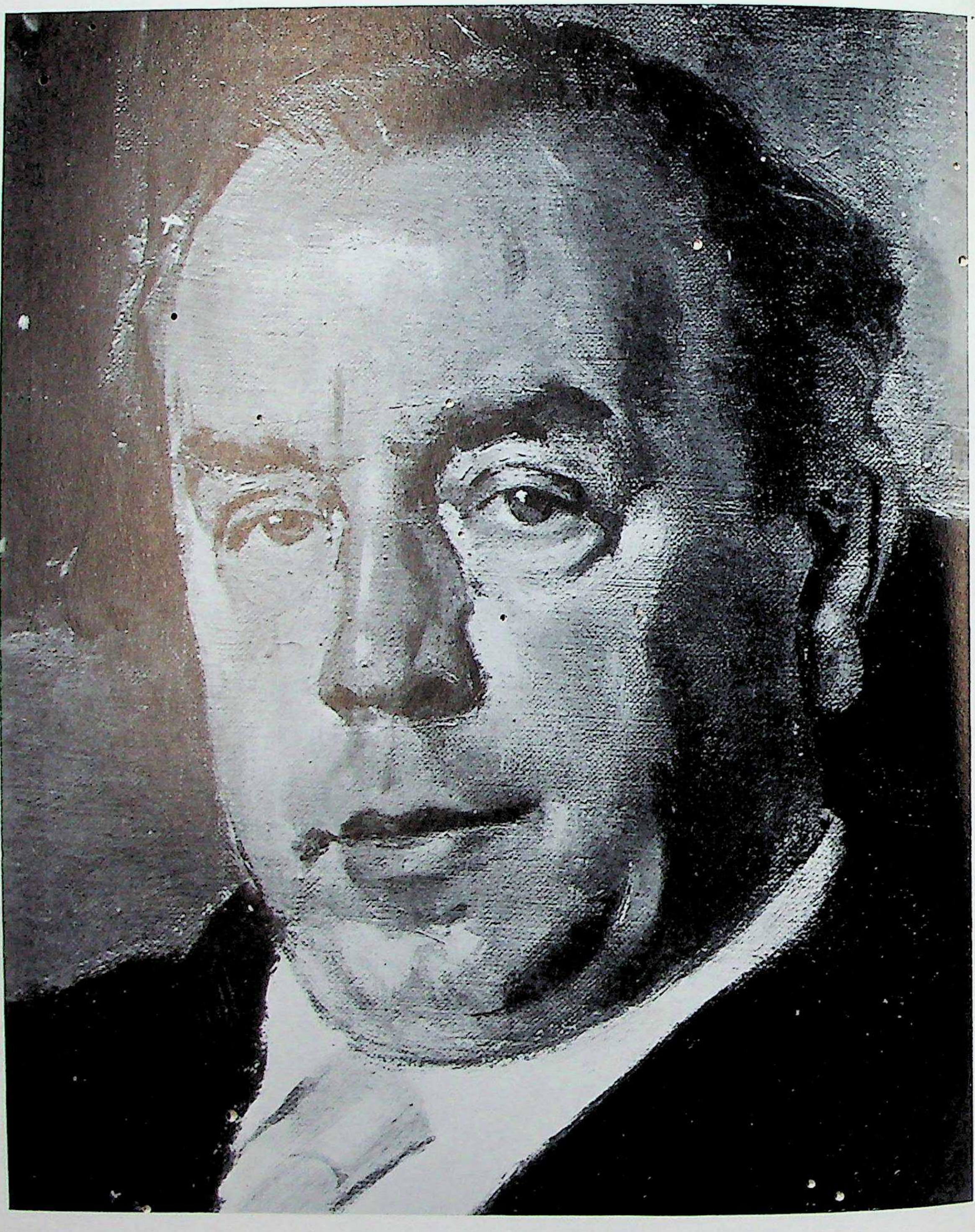
In actual fact, there is just as much delicacy and refinement required in painting a man as there is in painting a woman. To obtain the precise quality of character requires the utmost care and precision. But the most important thing is a feeling for the character of the sitter.

Another query is whether it is easier to paint somebody you know well. I do not think it is, personally, and of the three men whose portraits are illustrated, I knew Leonard Jennings well, but the other two scarcely at all before I painted them. Some of my best portraits are of people whom I had not met until they came into my studio for their first sitting.

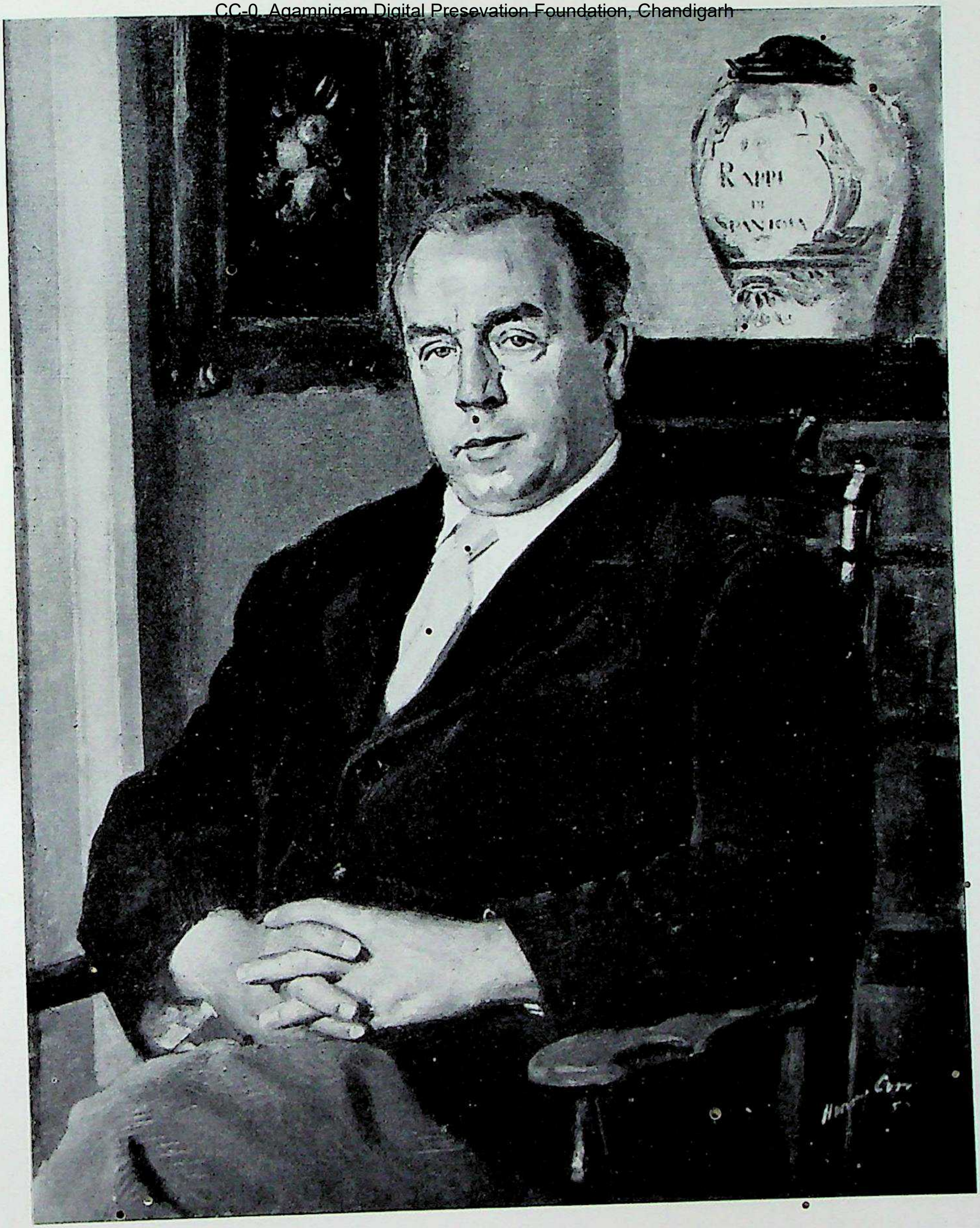
The professional portrait painter does, on the whole, paint more men than women. Most of these men are over middle-age and have been highly successful in their careers. In their own walks of life they may be tough, dominating and forceful men and one of the difficulties of the young artist is how to prevent them from dominating *him*. For the artist must be completely in charge in the studio and this is only properly achieved when he is



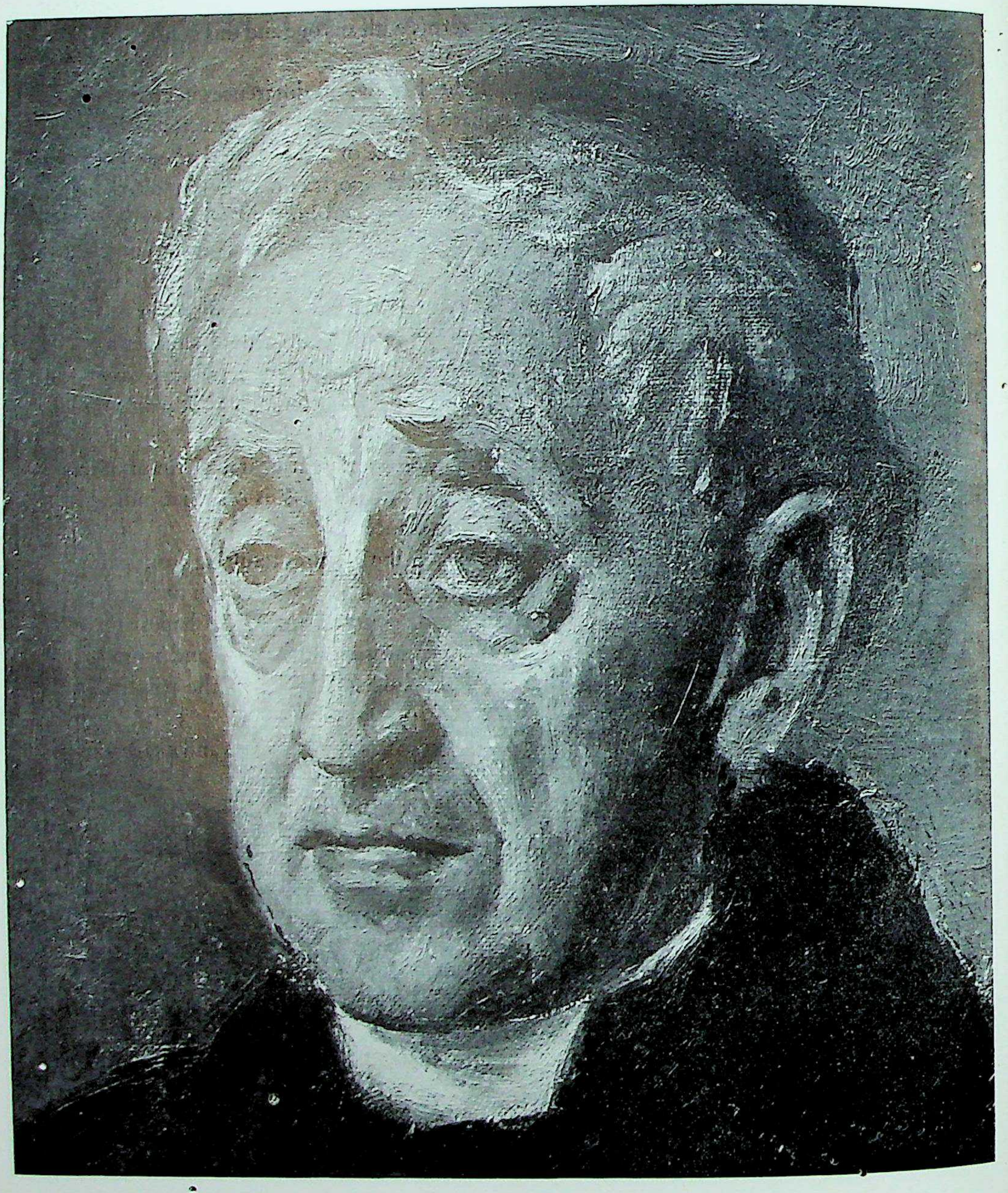
HENRY CARR *Leonard Jennings*



J. B. Priestley (detail)



HENRY CARR *J. B. Priestley*



HENRY CARR *Father Valentin*

LUCKNOW.

absolutely confident of his job. He is then on equal terms with anyone and this confidence is transmitted to the sitter, who is then as docile as a lamb.

In choosing these three portraits of men I thought the obvious differences in characteristics revealed would be of interest. The late Leonard Jennings is clearly a precise fellow—even pernickety. And he could be sarcastic; but with a force of personality that made him an interesting and, to me, a very good friend. I feel that the portrait conveys his character accurately and as he affected the dress in which I have painted him, all who knew him retain some affection for this portrait. It is surprisingly difficult, however, to draw a bowler hat and painting a check suit is by no means easy. To suggest the form inside the suit is obviously the first thing to be done and to achieve the right tone of ground colour of the suit and add the darker stripes so that the final combination was correct, took some experiment. I had several tries before I hit it off successfully. It would have been very easy to make a suit such as this too dominating and it was necessary to continually bear in mind the whole ensemble that was Leonard Jennings.

The portrait of J. B. Priestley demonstrates an entirely different character. In another part of the book, I have stated my reasons for choosing this pose. It is one that indicates complete relaxation in his own home together with assurance.

An enlarged detail of the portrait renders some idea of the textures resulting from painting a portrait in the manner described in this book. The texture *does* result from the method employed and not from an effort to make the surface look interesting. The shapes are, as one might expect from a writer of his capacity, clear and straightforward and from the artist's point of view, comparatively easy to grasp and understand, so that the painting is direct and forceful.

It can also be seen how the forms have been drawn in paint and the forms and expression having been achieved, there was no need for a high finish to the surface.

In the portrait of Father Valentin, the firm and clear character of the sitter has resulted in a direct and forceful statement. The shapes are so definite and vigorous in themselves that the painting is also vigorous. But it had to be executed with the utmost care and the greatest concentration. Although the paint looks free, heads such as this are not achieved by splashing on paint. It was, in fact, put on quite slowly and the actual brush strokes were deliberate and decided.

It is not an easy thing to realize, although it is important, that any vigour which may be apparent in the painting of a portrait stems from the artist's appreciation of where the strength of the sitter lies. It does not come from speed of brushwork. The very effort to attain this speed and achieve a looseness of painting is bound to let some of the real truth escape. The only way in which freedom of handling will come legitimately is when the artist knows exactly what to say and how to deal with his medium. It is impossible to emphasize too strongly the fact that true achievement comes from the brain and not from manual dexterity.

CHILD PORTRAITS

IN THIS revised edition, I have introduced two reproductions of child portraits. The portrait of Cécile was done, if I remember correctly, in three sittings, probably about three or four hours actually painting and if children are to be painted successfully they must be done rather quickly.

Cécile was three years of age and of course no child of that age can sit for any length of time and remain still and though she sat at a table and played with a small box she had full of her treasures, the success of a portrait of this description depends to a large extent on one's visual memory. Even though one suffers from children not sitting perfectly there is a compensation in that the shapes to remember and put down clearly are extremely simple. The thing to do is to try to remember all one can in one good look and then put down on canvas as much as possible in one go. To get something down that can then be corrected. Any idea of following, as in this case, the profile bit by bit, is impossible, but once some statement is made it is not difficult to see if the forehead bulges enough or if the angle of the nose is correct and it is quite astonishing how good a likeness can be achieved by just watching the big general shapes and then when these are fairly right the smaller detail, which is also very simple, can be managed.

Any efforts to paint a child in the way one would paint a portrait of somebody who can remain in the same position for some considerable time, just results in exasperation on the part of the artist and probably a very sulky and impossible child.

Not only does a child become exhausted more quickly than an adult at having to remain even in the same chair for any length of time, but the artist also becomes exhausted quicker. The effort to remember a shape that may only be seen for a fleeting moment is extremely tiring and in my experience it is no use fighting this. It must be accepted and the painter should be prepared to rest himself and his sitter for considerably longer periods than the actual sittings. If one paints children then one must be prepared to waste time gracefully, in fact to have no more consideration for time than the child itself.

Painting children can be very rewarding if pursued on these lines, for children can be so beautiful, the shapes have such purity that a successful effort is highly satisfying.

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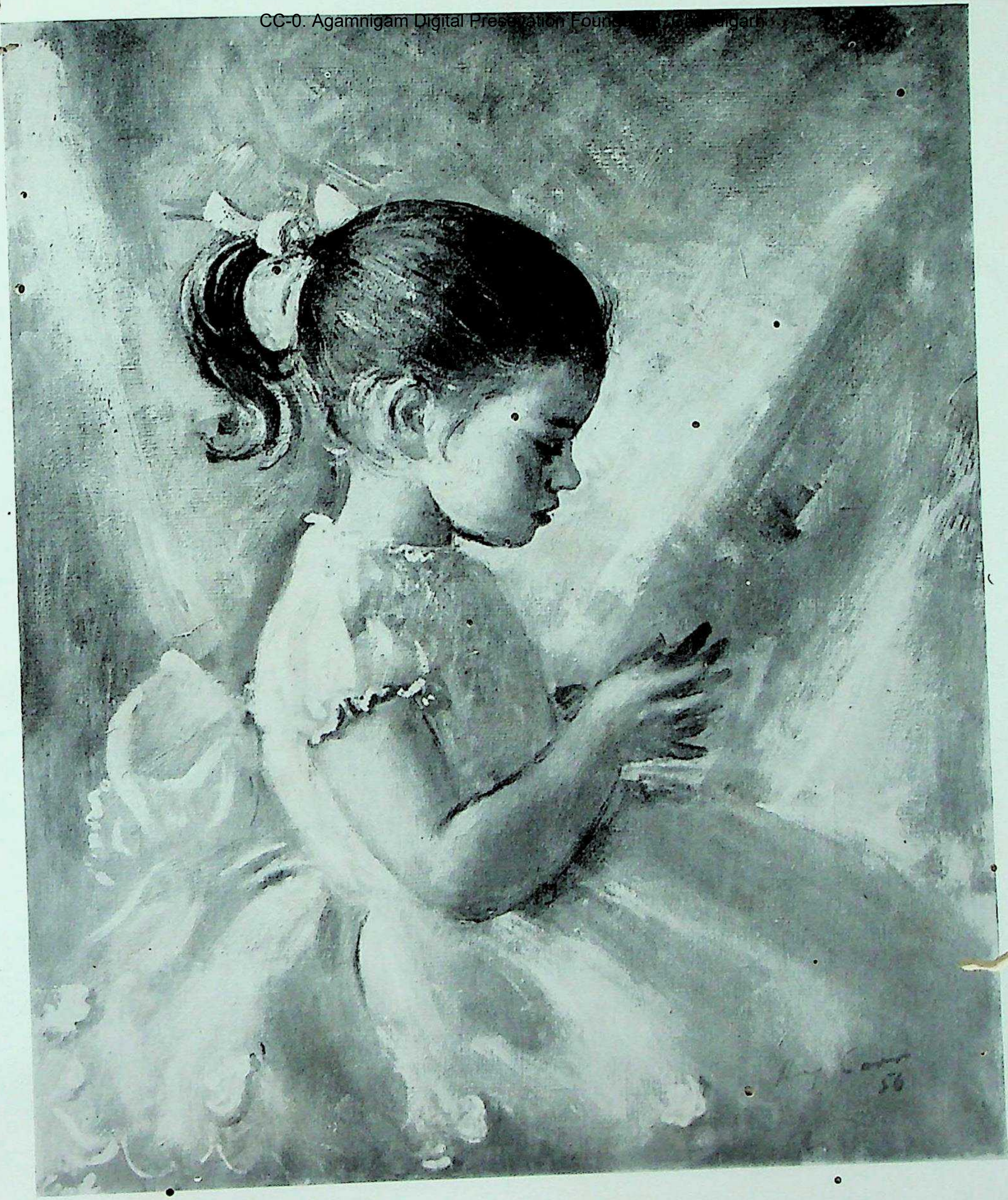
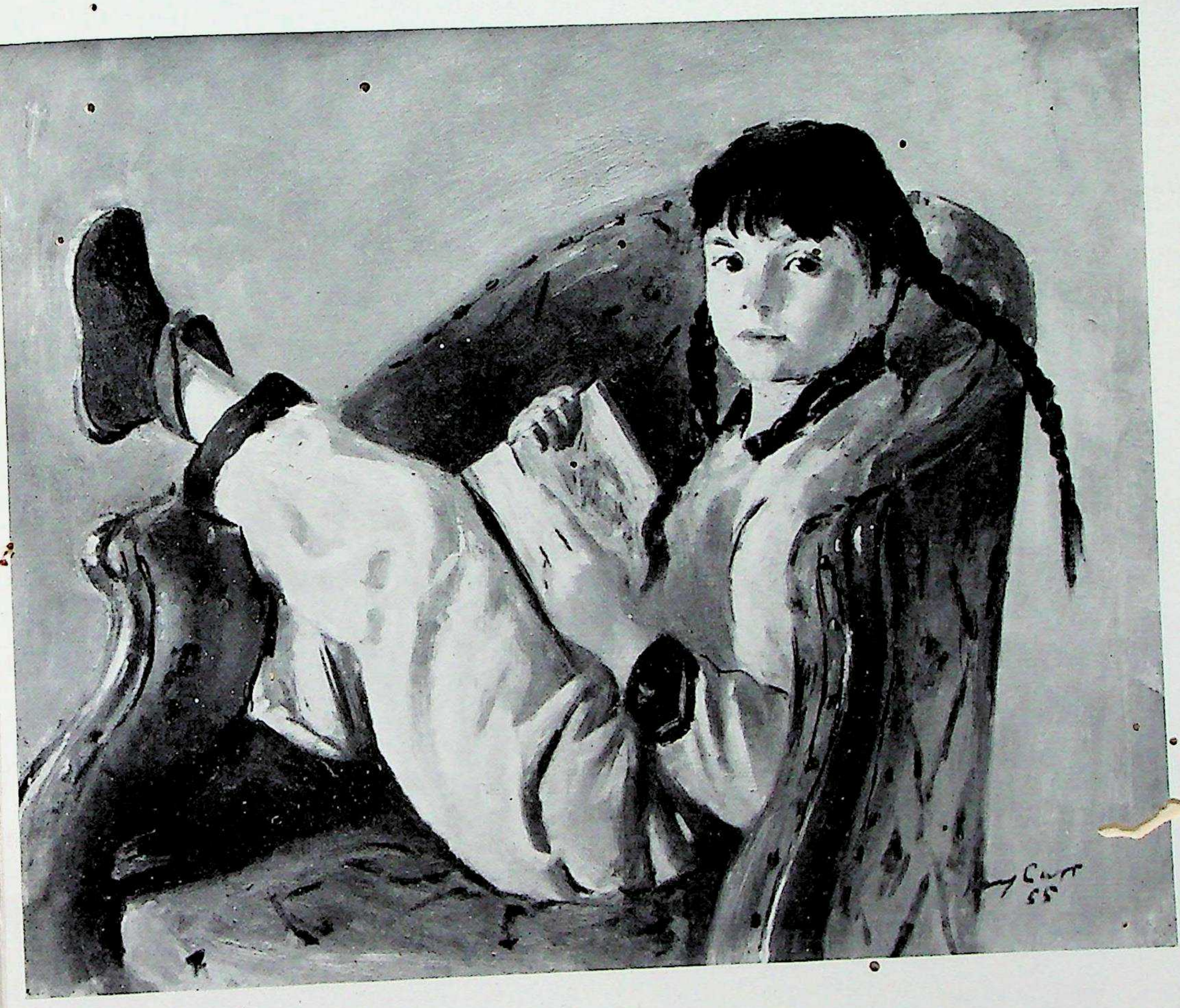


HENRY CARR *Cécile*

Children are not so difficult to paint as some people imagine. In fact if they can be persuaded to sit tolerably still they are much easier than adults. They have a simplicity of form which can be grasped almost at a glance. There is no complication of character to upset the artist, so that if the painter is a master of drawing, the head can be very directly and simply stated.

This painting of my granddaughter was done in two mornings and it is clear that if one can grasp the essentials quickly and put them down with speed the life and vitality of the subject is in no danger of being lost.

It must be remembered however, speed of painting only leads to disaster unless there is absolute certainty regarding these essentials.



HENRY CARR *The Artist's American Granddaughter*

FORMAL PORTRAITS

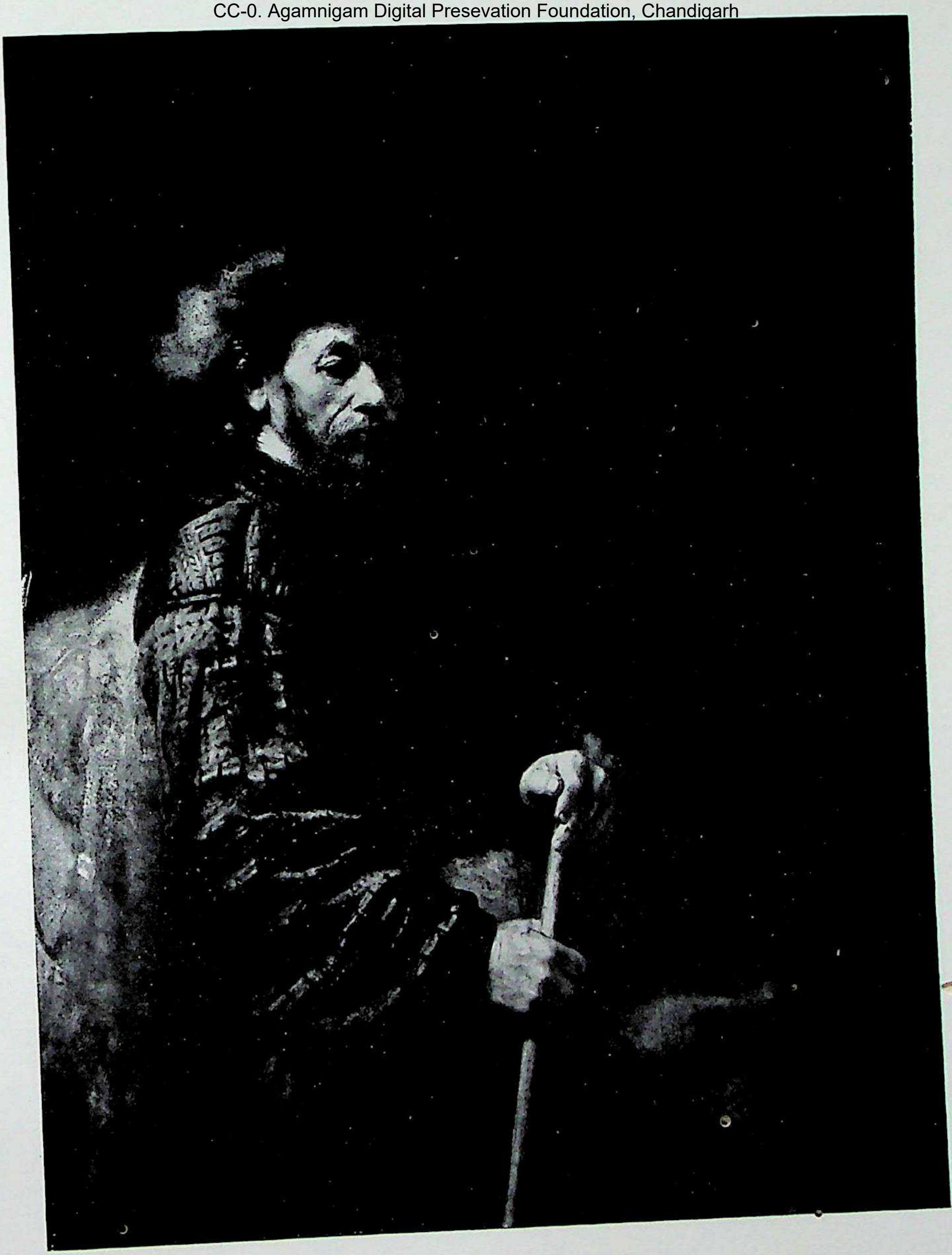
THERE IS some confusion concerning the exact nature of a formal portrait. A formal portrait is one which owes part of its significance to the ceremonial qualities, and not all to the character study of the head.

It is perfectly reasonable that Mr X, a successful business executive, should be complimented by his colleagues on the portrait now hanging in the board room. He is painted, therefore, in an immaculate dark suit, with collar and cuffs (which, by the way, are fascinating to paint), complete with handkerchief in breast pocket. The uncompromising way in which he is seated in the chair adds to the dignity of the picture, and however beautifully painted may be the head and hands, they are subsidiary to the ceremonial-formal presentation of a man who has succeeded in business. Similar analysis can be applied to any portrait in which the head does not carry practically the whole weight.

This secondary consideration can take an unusual turn, in which case the portrait becomes very informal as, for example, Gainsborough's picture of the two children chasing a butterfly, *The Painter's Daughters*, in the National Gallery, London.

There are degrees of formality. A man wants his wife painted; and because his interest in the picture lies in what she represents to him, he does not, for instance, have to study the picture to know what she looks like: so that, with an attractive dress, a certain delicate feminine formality will be introduced into the picture.

A large number of Rembrandt's portraits are quite informal. All ceremony and irrelevant dignity are put aside in order to avoid distraction from the main consideration—Rembrandt's presentation of a human being, rather than that of a representative of a certain accepted way of life. But this portrait of a Jew is a good example of one of his formal portraits and a magnificently painted head combined. Such a combination is not always appreciated to-day, there being so many who automatically, in their own minds, confuse 'formality' with 'dullness'.



REMBRANDT VAN RYN *A Jew Merchant*

REPRODUCED BY COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES, THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

Qualities

TEXTURE

THERE IS NO consciousness of surface unless it is broken with some texture or other. For instance, if one looks through a small hole at a perfect enamel surface, and nothing else whatever can be seen, it will be impossible to say how far this surface is from the eye, or even what it is. Surface texture is important to the realization of form. Violent texture will give a greater sense of form, all other things being equal, than a smooth texture. Artists who have desired a strong sense of reality have used methods of painting which leave a broken surface, or have made some effort to paint a surface. Rembrandt used fairly thick paint and very definite brush marks. Renoir's painting is often enamel light in its smoothness of surface, but the tones are always broken by small strokes of the brush. In all the masters of portraiture it arises naturally from their vision, which has dictated their methods of using paint. The consciousness of the surface texture of the portrait does undoubtedly add to the reality of the form, but as it would be difficult to paint a portrait entirely without it, the whole question of texture remains one of intensity. The interest the artist has in various textures in his subjects should determine the intensity of the texture in the painting. Consciousness of this variety will find some method of dealing with it, whereas if the artist is only conscious of the form, tone and colour, he is perfectly justified in ignoring the different textures and allowing his method of work to provide what texture it will.

What is not allowed is self-consciousness about texture. There is some relation between the final texture of a painting and the value of the artist's vision; for if an artist is dominated sufficiently by an idea, by pursuit of a vision, he is not attracted by side-issues. To all intents and purposes he and his objectives are alone in the world. This ruthlessness brings about the directness of approach that leads to good technique. The artist becomes entirely unself-conscious of his methods, or rather of his final texture, so that if the absence of self-consciousness can be recognized in the way the painting has been done, and the final texture is entirely the result of a direct approach, then the vision that inspired this directness must have been effectual.

And vice versa. When the surface of the paint betrays self-consciousness, then the vision is almost bound to be ineffectual. It betrays the interest the artist has in displaying his own sensitivity; he is trying to make his work look better than it really is; his own ego gets in the way of his vision. To-day this self-consciousness of surface texture has developed into an open search for fascinating textures. It is like the cook who puts colouring matter into his cooking, so that the appearance of the food is good, regardless of the food itself. It is surprising how many people believe in this ersatz method.

COLOUR AND TONE RELATIONSHIP

THE DIFFICULTY of teaching colour and tone relation has been referred to; but there are one or two things to be said about this relationship which may be helpful. Firstly, there is always the danger of painting what one thinks the colour should be, rather than what it is. For example, in painting a landscape, if the sky is blue many students make it *too* blue. Grass is green, so where is the green paint? asks the inexperienced painter. In portrait painting, it is easy to assume that flesh is a yellowish pink, so yellow ochre and vermilion appear to be the solution. Put a cool coloured skin against a warm background and it may look blue. Dare you paint it blue? It is the relationship of colour that must be observed, and any previous idea of what the colour should be must be entirely forgotten. Looked at in an entirely objective way, forgetting what has previously been accepted, the sky may be a dirty mauve, the grass a queer blue, and flesh may be almost any colour under the sun.

Many painters of the immediate past have prepared our minds for this objective attitude. As has been previously said, it may not be so difficult for a present-day student who is familiar with the works of Cézanne, Bonnard, Vuillard and others, to grasp the idea of colour relationships. The interest in colour has been very strong for some time, and shadows and darks have been translated into positive colour, the insistence being on colour relations rather than tone relations. To many modern eyes this saturation of colour is indispensable to painting, but it should be remembered that what is possible on the shores of the Mediterranean may be out of place in more northern countries. The colour harmonies that are convincing to a painter of southern France, for instance, would hardly be convincing to a painter of northern England. If there is any truth in the idea that our colour sense belongs to our nursery days, then the great painters should undoubtedly have been influenced by the colours of their native lands; and it is more than likely that any importation of ideas from painters working a thousand miles nearer the equator will be a bad rather than a good influence. Certainly Italian influence on the Dutch and Flemish painters was extremely bad.

It should be expected, then, that this colour relation in more northern latitudes would be fused more with tone relationships, and that good painting will always show characteristics belonging to the place of its birth.

Although throughout this book there has been an insistence on the development of mind and the gathering of knowledge, it should be obvious to the thoughtful person that no development of mind or gathering of knowledge can help us to explain precisely our personal preferences and our real instincts.

This idea that our sense of colour belongs to our nursery days applies also to our feeling for form, tone and calligraphic qualities. There is an instinctive quality that creeps into painting which, if good, is called artistic; but it has nothing to do with the processes. This instinctive quality is an indispensable part of talent in any of the arts.

OBSERVATION

WHEN SOMETHING has gone wrong with a portrait and the artist or student finds it difficult to decide where it has gone wrong, it can generally be said that what is wrong will only be found by closer observation.

It is nearly always the difficulty of seeing rather than the difficulty of manipulation of paint. It is not always easy to understand this difficulty of observing correctly. But if we remember the simple drawing a child might do of a head—a shape with just marks for the eyes, nose and mouth—it will be realized that observation is a combination of knowledge and understanding as well as seeing.

The student interested in portrait painting will constantly seek for knowledge of all the problems—the main forms of the head, and the principles regarding the formation of the features. Perspective will help the observation of foreshortened forms, and knowledge of light and shade the true values of tone.

The proper integration of this knowledge with true observation is the student's business, as is the training of the mind to define precisely his appreciation. This defining of appreciation will limit the extent, and thus concentrate his knowledge and observation.

For example, not many artists would find it necessary to carry their observation and knowledge to the microscopic stage.

It is, then, this appreciation, this personal preference that will decide what has to be observed, and looking at examples of masters' work, it is obvious that there is no rule.

There is a wide difference between what has been observed in portraits by Raeburn and in portraits by Gainsborough; in fact, it is difficult to find any two artists observing the same things.

The post-Impressionists who were all interested in colour and light, sought for knowledge of colour relations and reactions to direct observation and understanding.

There is a school of thought to-day that puts forward the theory that learning is dangerous, as it tends to destroy feeling and expression. This idea has never been summed up better than by Pope:

A little learning is a dang'rous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.

It need hardly be said that good painting does not spring from just an accumulation of learning.

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AESTHETICS

THOUSANDS AND thousands of words have been written and spoken about the aesthetics of painting, most of them to no purpose. Considering the confusion to-day in many people's minds regarding the nature of a real work of art, and what good painting is, it is necessary to reassure the would-be portrait painter that good portraits are, and always have been, important paintings.

Firstly, there can be little doubt that, in the history of painting, portrait painting has made a valuable contribution to the culture of all ages. The nature of man being what it is, and interest in our fellow men—past, present and future—having such an important place in our lives, portraits will continue to interest men and women of all periods.

If there is this continued patronage for portrait painters, there is no reason to doubt that there will always be specialists in this work; and it is only natural to expect that now and then some of these specialists will exhibit that natural talent—in fact, all the necessary qualifications—that goes to the making of a good artist.

Secondly, any work done by the hand of man, if done with insight and knowledge of the problems involved, will have character and quality, and will rise to the stature of a work of art when the problems involved are sufficiently interesting to hold the attention of mankind through long periods of time.

Thirdly, to the person who is sincerely interested in portrait painting, the question of whether he is doing a work of art does not arise. He is doing a job—an extremely interesting one—that is satisfying in itself. To the painter this is enough, and arguments about aesthetics, though they be a pleasant intellectual exercise, should not drag him away from his subject.

In portrait painting whatever ideas there may be regarding the quality of paint, the relation of forms, tones, colours and the interest of textures, the portrait is eventually judged by its proper assessment of character on the part of the artist, and on the charm, the virility, the gentleness and whatever other qualities are inherent in the character of the sitter. The sitter must live in a portrait to look out at future generations—and the spectator looking in at it must feel assured that it is a painting of a real person. No clever painting, tricks of design or artificial texture will excuse the portrait that lacks the vital spark of life.

What must be remembered is that acceptance of recognized methods of painting a portrait, that is methods that may at the moment be fashionable and that may hide any real interest the artist has in his sitter, will undoubtedly appear to future generations as acceptance of conventions. For conventions in past periods were the fashionable aesthetic qualities of their day, and there is no reason to assume that the fashionable aesthetic qualities of our day will appear in a more rosy light to future generations.

To the artist, intellectual activity is probably most usefully employed in defining his own instincts; but it is difficult to say what is done by a process of reasoning and what is done by instinct. There is no doubt that the sitter does, by the character and the quality he reveals, influence the artist in making his decision on the method by which it will be best achieved. In looking at the work of the masters of portrait painting, it is easy to see the influence the sitter has had on the method of work. The child portraits of Velazquez are quite different from the portraits of the men he painted, and Rembrandt used a much smoother paint in his portraits of young women than in those of women of more mature age. In choosing Margaret to sit for the demonstration portrait there was an instinctive feeling that only a precise painting of the form would reveal the inherent qualities.

PERSPECTIVE

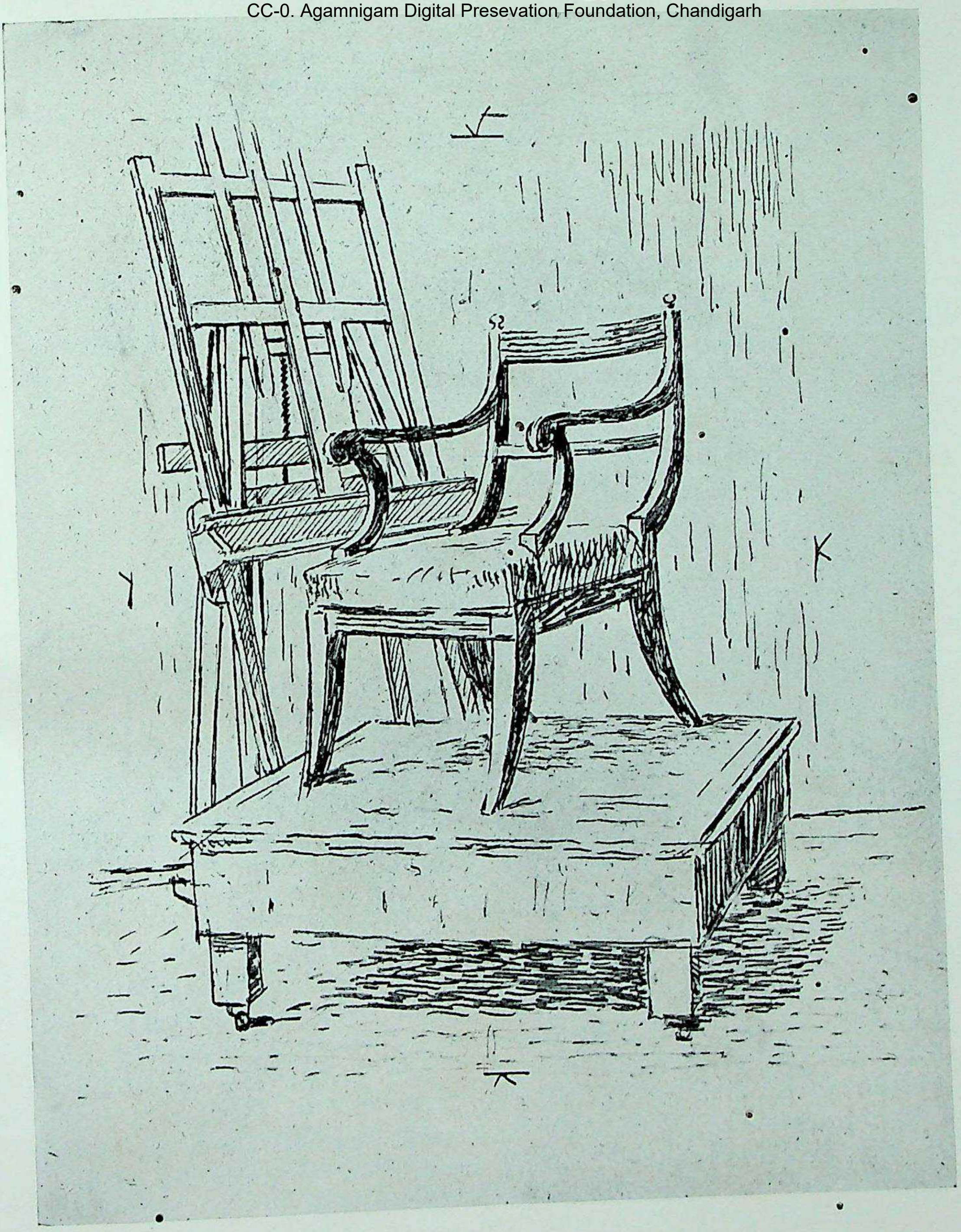
FEW MODERN artists are interested in perspective, but any competent artist or student should be able to draw simple common objects, using his knowledge of perspective and an appreciation of proportion to be able to get a simple group such as this to look right and convincing.

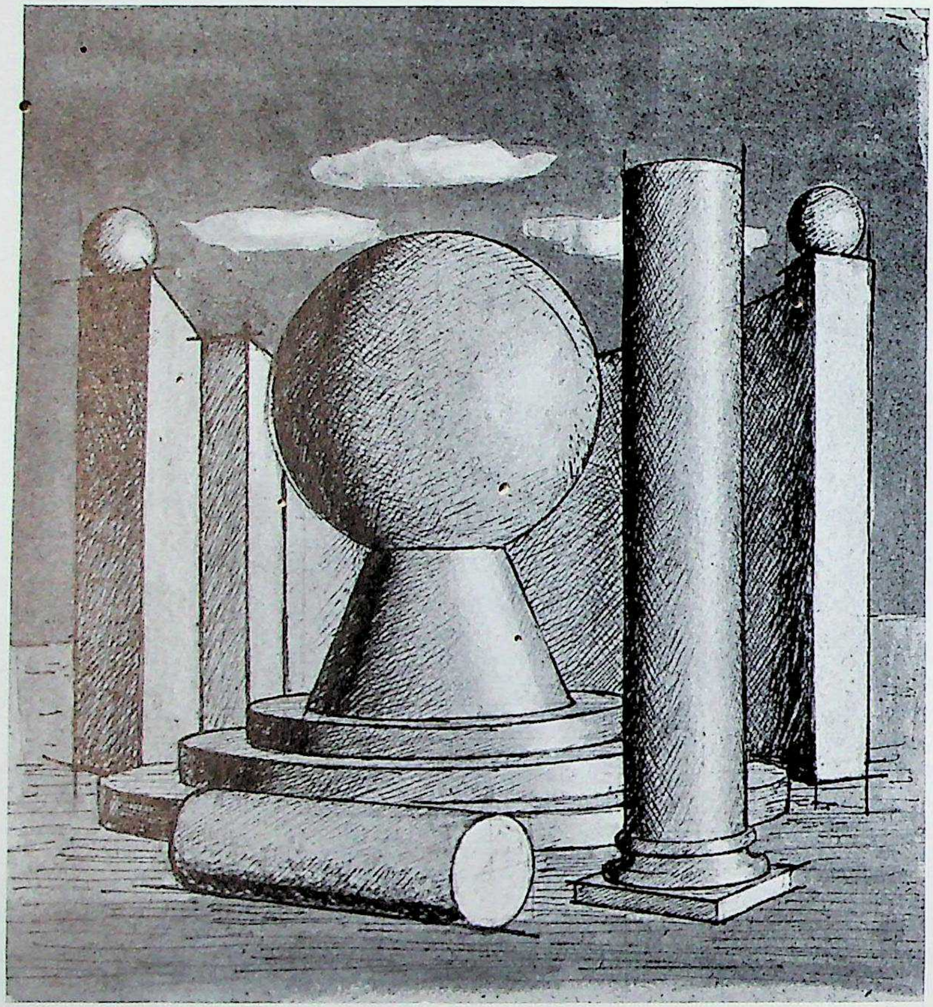
It is fairly obvious that if the drawing of a chair is difficult the drawing of the figure sitting in it will be well-nigh impossible. Granted that the additional interest in the figure may be much more stimulating, it is still impossible to escape entirely from the need of understanding elementary perspective.

The important thing in any drawing of solid forms is to be aware of the actual surfaces of the forms. It is not enough to know and apply just the rules of perspective. For instance, in drawing a corner of a room it is not enough to have just the lines marking the position of floor, walls and ceiling in correct perspective. It is much more important to make an effort to draw the actual surfaces in relation to one another. Even if the perspective is wrong, a drawing which makes the spectator almost feel the floor or the wall or the ceiling has the right attitude. To be conscious of real form, rather than just resolving it into accurate perspective, and yet know enough about perspective to observe truly, is the aim.

The mechanics must only serve the over-all purpose of the job—in themselves they are dull and uninteresting.

This attitude of really observing the form, and the surface of the form, must be carried into the business of portrait painting. It is this reality of form that will make a portrait convincing and powerful.



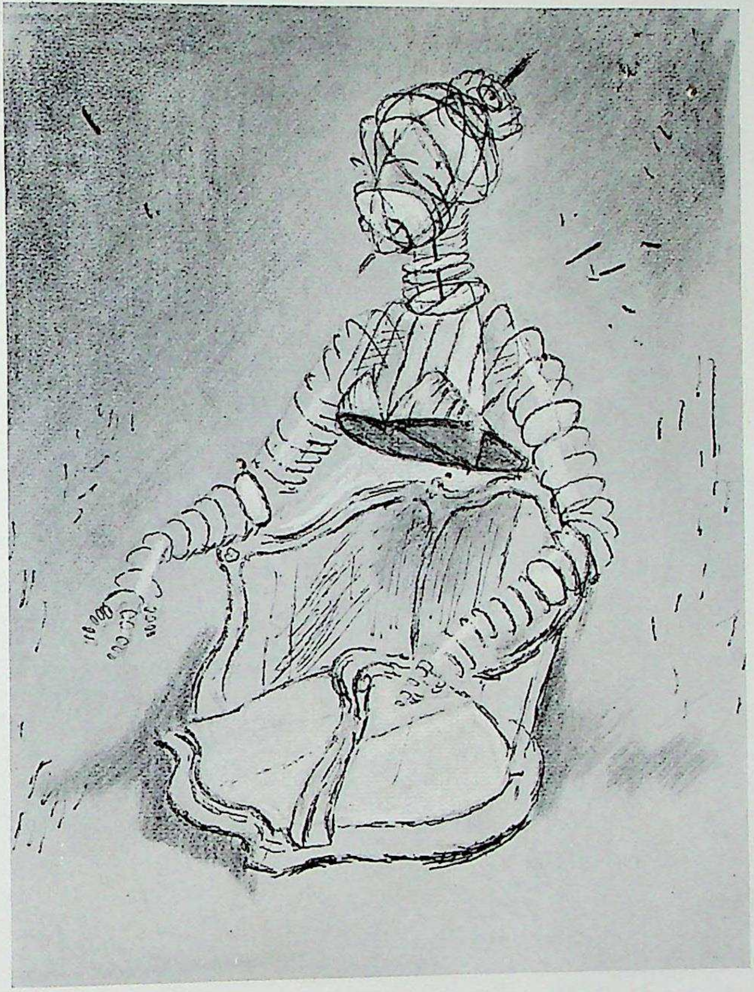


LIGHT AND SHADE

THE KNOWLEDGE and ability to make forms look solid by the use of light and shade must be acquired by the serious student. The theory is absurdly simple. Planes become dark as they turn from the source of light, and the manipulation is not difficult so long as one observes the actual form closely enough. It is not sufficient to judge the form by the observed light and shade, as the tonal qualities of any object may be complicated by colour or a change of actual tone in the object itself. The pure form must be understood before it can be drawn or painted.

This simple drawing in light and shade illustrates all that need be known and the extent of the manipulation necessary, though, of course, the ability required to express the delicacy of alteration of the planes of a head is a little more difficult.

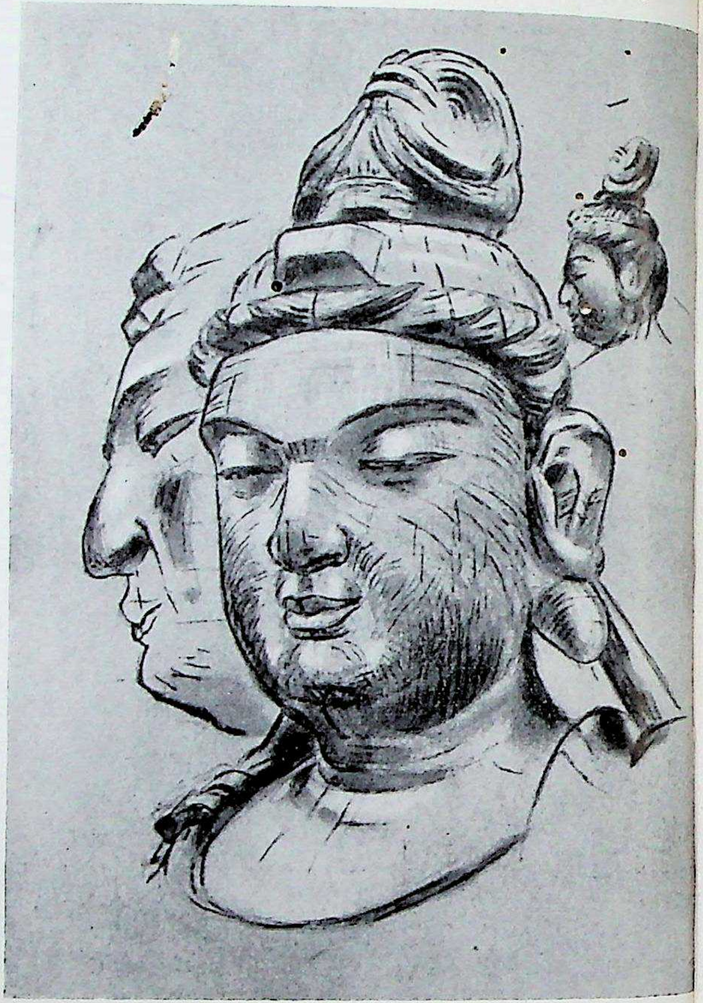
This knowledge of light and shade and of perspective is indispensable to any artist who is interested in any way in form. What type of form is immaterial—its drawing or painting just cannot be expressed without bringing at least one of these principles into it.



CONTOURS

THIS DRAWING of the figure by means of contours and sections, puts further emphasis on the fact that the figure is solid, and not just a pattern of shapes in the background, and on the fact that form occupies space.

Any study that adds emphasis to this idea is valuable, for it is the mind which grasps the fact that form goes beyond the edges which will find a solution to the problem of the painting of edges of the head and figure so that the form appears to go round and beyond them. A portrait cannot exist without a sculptural sense, for portrait painting is not caricature, nor the making of a hieroglyphic that has some resemblance to a person. It must exist in space.



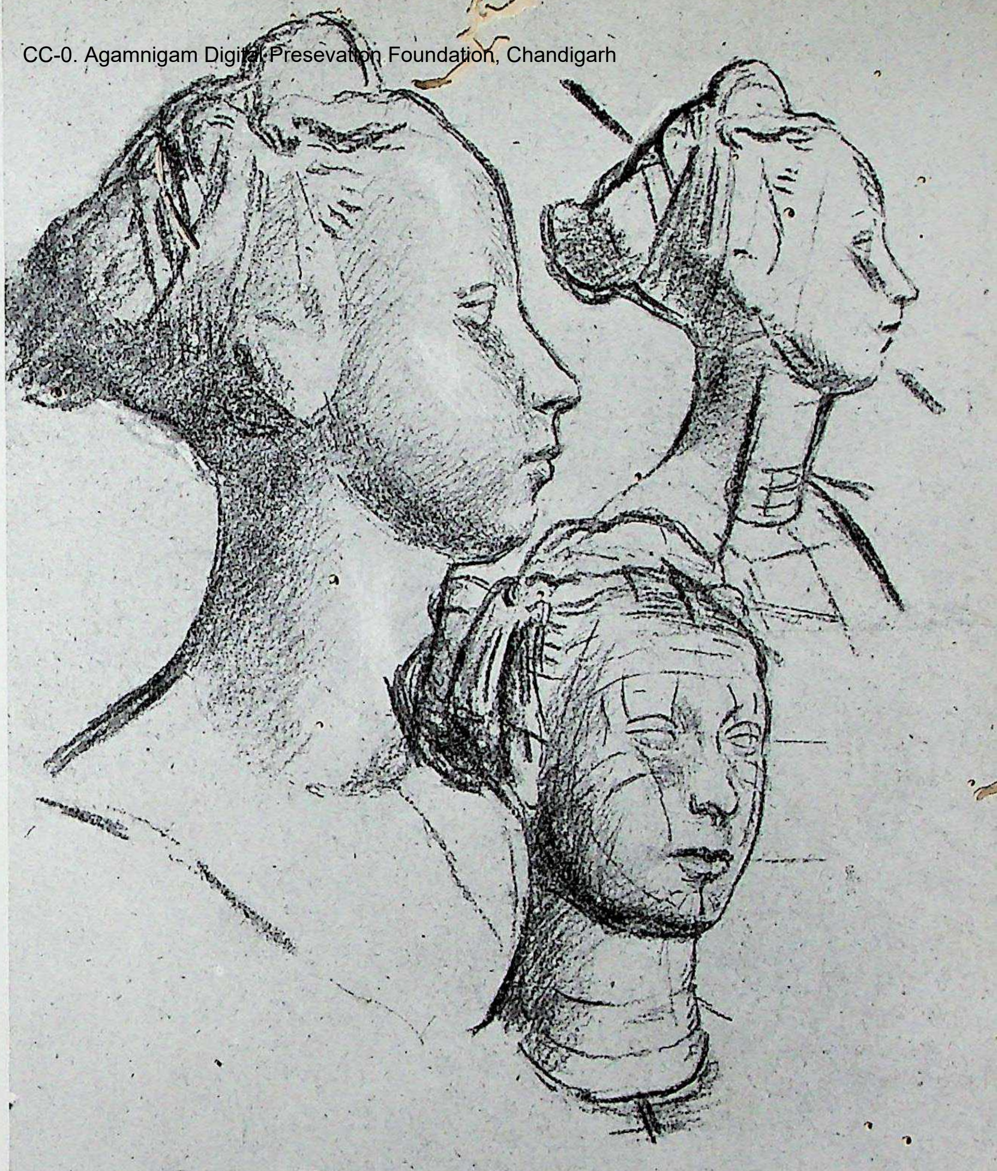
ANTIQUE HEADS

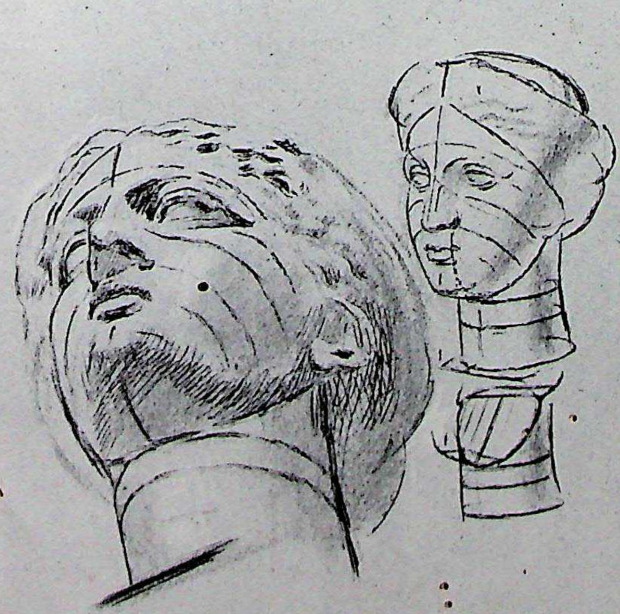
THE DRAWINGS of these three sculptured heads have been done to show the big forms of the head and neck, and are to some extent, with the sections suggested, self-explanatory.

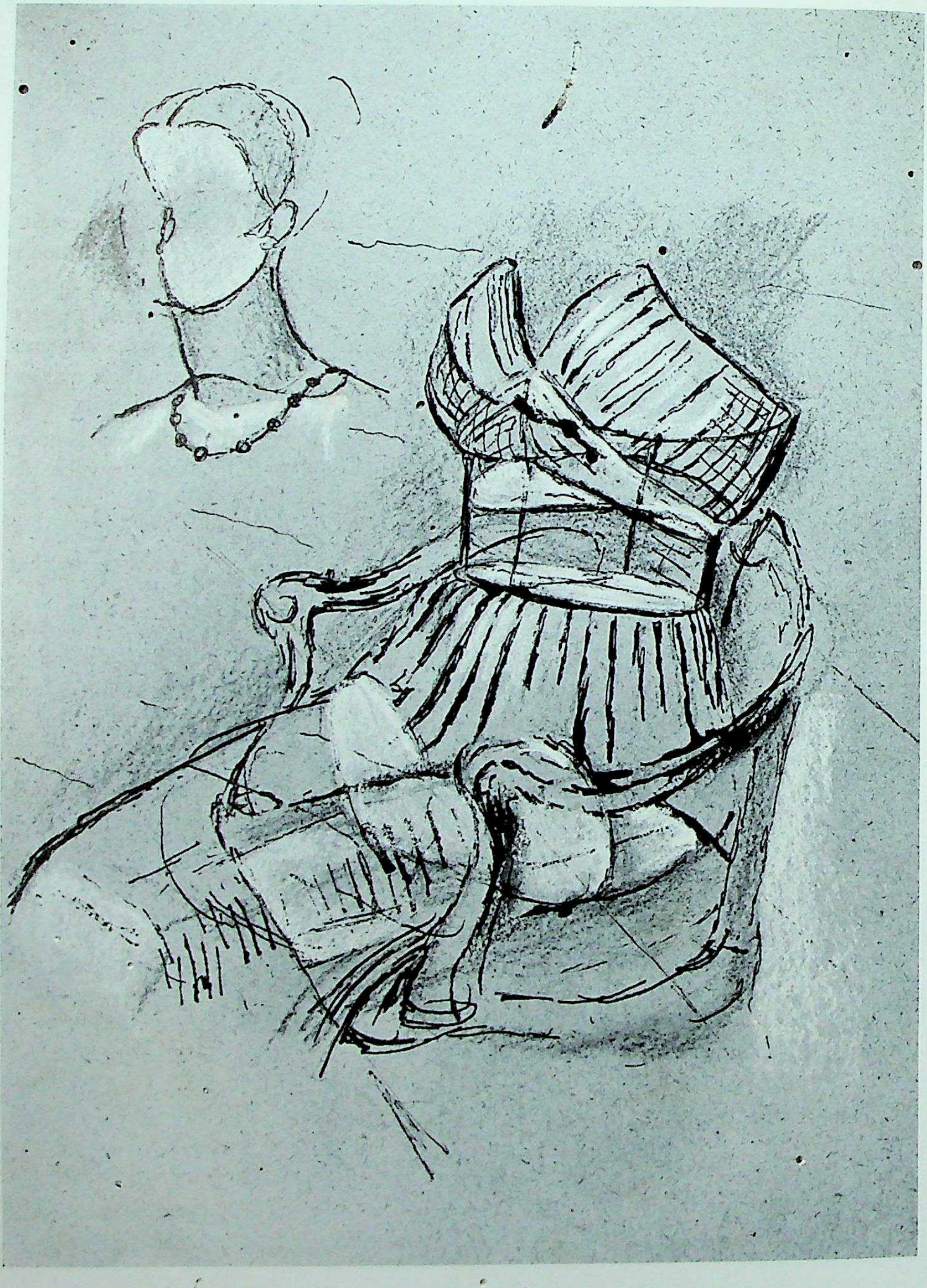
The study of the antique has gone out of fashion, chiefly because it degenerated into drawings designed to demonstrate the skill of the student; but as any good portrait bust must achieve its distinction because the artist has understood and demonstrated his appreciation of relationships of the basic forms, and as these basic forms are thus a little easier to follow than in a life model, some such study would be a valuable help. There is no reason to prolong such study once the idea of the main forms has been grasped, though the study of casts can also be a help in achieving the necessary ability to translate a solid form on to a flat surface.

In the Renaissance head the axis of the main form of the head and neck is shown, and this appreciation of the balance of shapes is extremely important in portrait painting. In the Chinese head the profile has been observed at the same time as the drawing of the full face, and in the Greek head it is fairly clear that the far cheek and the near cheek are part of one form. The simple perspective drawing of the way the hair rests on the forehead is clear, as is also the way the head sits on the neck.

It is rare in painting a portrait to find a sitter where these things are as clear and as definite as in these drawings, but an understanding of the principles involved allows the divergencies from those in the normal sitter to be also understood.







DRESS

THE PAINTING of dress may not be so exciting as it was in some periods of portrait painting, but it still remains a fascinating and interesting problem. The colour of men's costume to-day could never be called bright, but it is a mistake to think it drab and to approach the business of painting it with that prejudice in mind. The tailors and cutters who retain a sense of style and design would uphold the elegance of a well-cut jacket, and they would be right; the form is very interesting and the folds have a rhythmical quality which is good to draw. It is an affectation of many men that they always prefer their old baggy coats, and some artists have gathered the idea that a man painted in some old sports get-up is more pictorial than one painted in, say, city clothes. The women on the whole do not subscribe to this belief, and, if I may express a personal opinion, I am on the side of the angels.

But whatever colour or tone the dress, the thing to know is the form of the figure that fills it, and to appreciate the fact that clothes can decorate as well as hide it.

In painting flesh it is easy to see the lights, the half-tones and the darks, but in dark material it is very difficult to distinguish the lights from the half-tones. What must be followed is the form of the garment, so that observation is helped by knowledge in the matter of light and shade. Deep ultramarine and raw umber, sometimes with a touch of viridian or crimson alazarin, is useful in the painting of dark clothes, as it is fairly easy to vary the colour quality without altering the tonal quality, and it is also not a greasy colour to use. Some artists prefer black as a basic colour for such things as dark clothes. It may be a matter for individual experiment.

To paint the dress is, on the whole, a comparatively simple problem compared to a head; but it cannot be scamped, and in the first sitting the general tone should be there, and the actual drawing should be settled before any serious painting is done. If this drawing is fixed on a good ground of tone, it should be possible almost to finish a garment like a coat in one sitting. The dress that Margaret is wearing in the portrait has been analytically dissected, like the rest of her, to illustrate the salient points in the drawing, and of the problems involved. The artist is aware, too, that there is a back to the figure, and should not, therefore, stop drawing, as it were, on the edges of what he can actually see: this is very important in giving that sense of solidity so necessary in good draughtsmanship.

HANDS

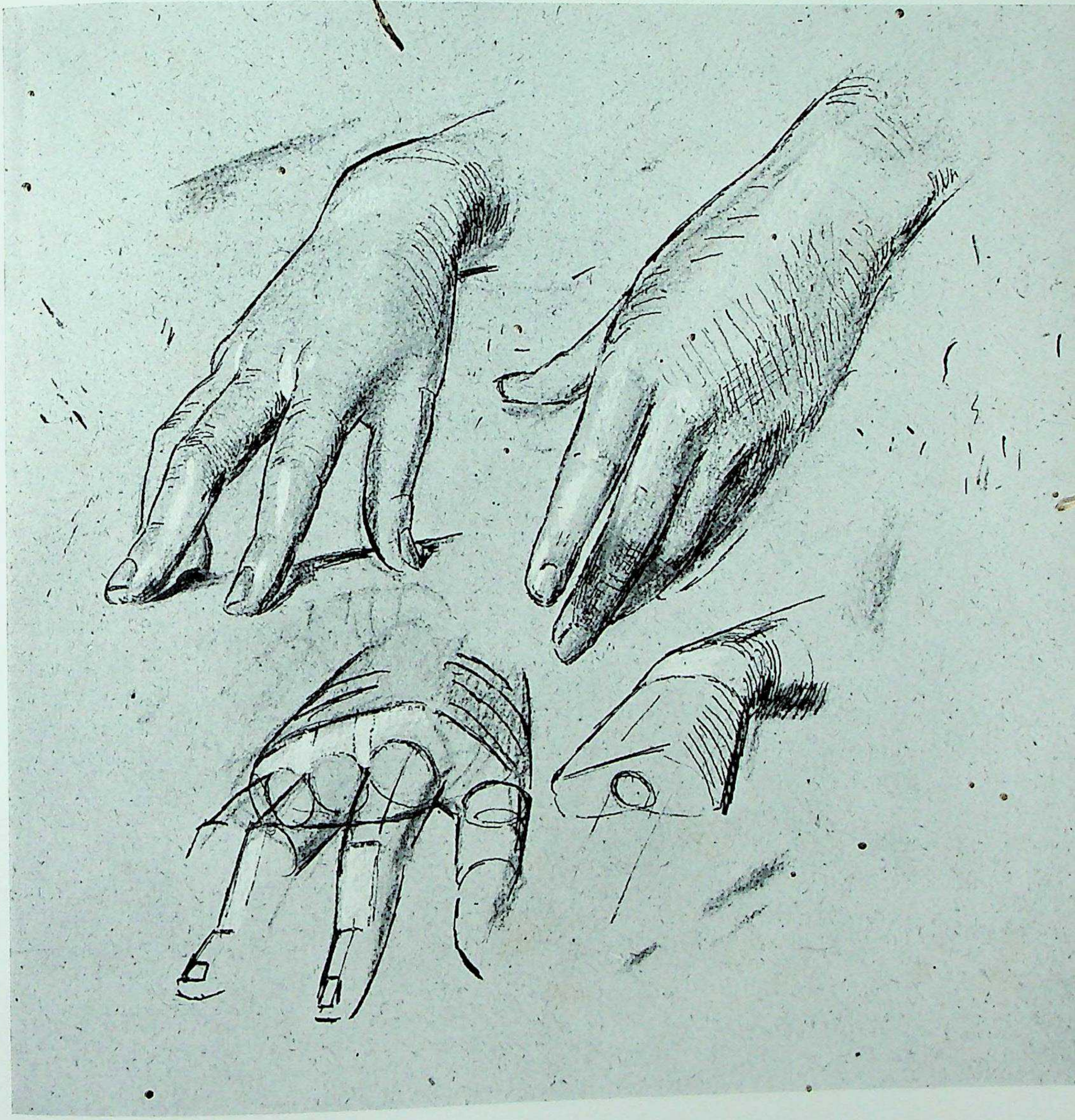
IT IS often said that hands are the most difficult part of a portrait to paint. This has some truth in it, as hands are extremely difficult to keep still or to get back, once they have moved, into their original pose. This is simply because each hand has five movable digits that can, and do, all move separately. When the hands do keep still, there is no more difficulty in painting them than anything else.

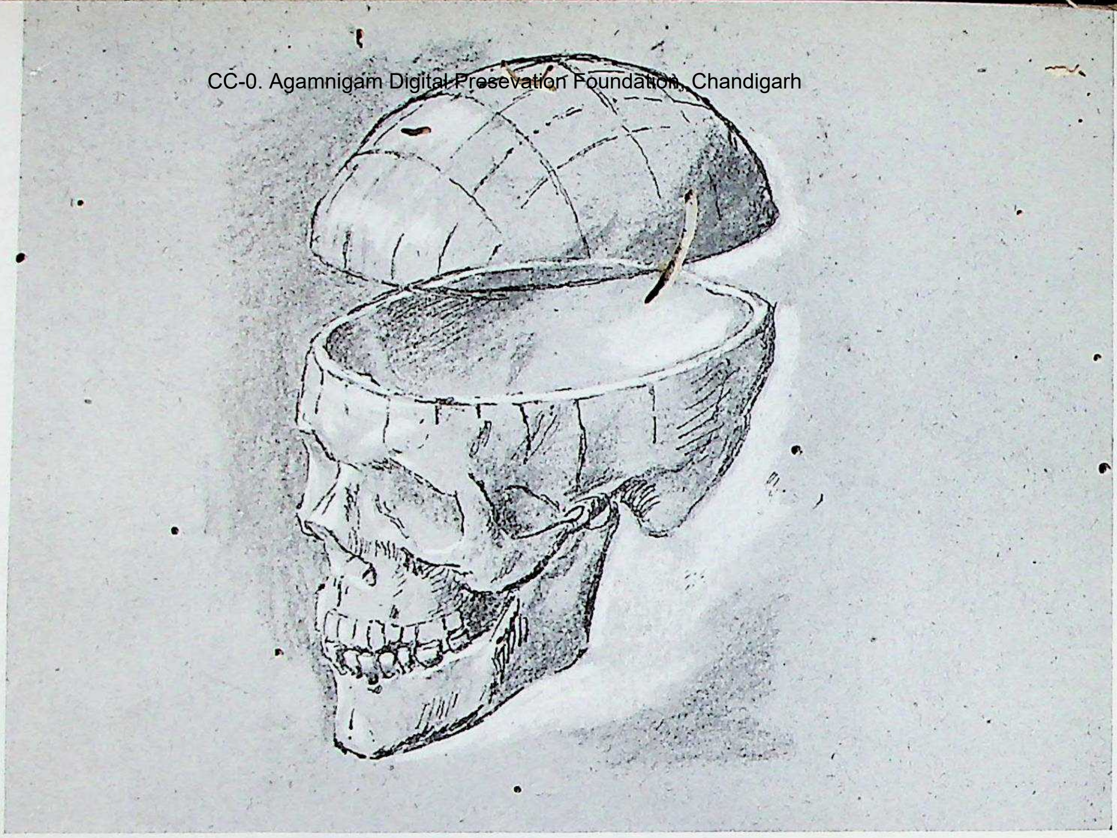
What can easily happen is for the head to be given first priority, and work on the hands to be attempted near the end of a sitting, when the artist is tired and, perhaps, not fully concentrating. If it is desired that the hands should be thoroughly well drawn and painted, then one or two sittings should be devoted entirely to them.

To-day is the day of the sketch rather than the finished picture, and many portrait painters have accepted this attitude to the extent of leaving the lower part of the picture merely suggested, including, of course, the hands. This attitude does at the moment look little more than a fashion of the nineteen twenties and thirties. It is, however, not possible to lay down any law on such an attitude, although it is obviously wrong to accept a current fashion merely to escape a difficulty in painting.

If it is intended to paint the hands in some detail, then, when the moment comes to start on them, it is necessary to pose them with the greatest care; and, having got them in the right position, to start drawing them in paint, concentrating on the exact position of the fingers etc, and not bothering too much about any detail, or minor subtleties of tone or colour. The important thing is to get the over-all position quite clear in the mind, and the placing of the hands as definite and as clear as possible before the first real effort at painting them is attempted. The general background colour of the hands should be painted, of course, in the first sitting on the portrait.

One difficulty should be eliminated at a time, and if at the first attempt at the hands the shapes are well and truly defined, then the tone and colour relation will not offer such a difficult problem at the next sitting. The drawing of the hands in a position similar to that of the hands in the painting gives some idea of the difficulties involved. The mere drawing of the form, and the mechanics of the construction emphasized, should all help towards a more precise knowledge of the problem to be tackled, and of its solution.





THE SKULL

THIS DRAWING of the skull is intended to be a further help in the search for knowledge. It is difficult for a professional artist to say precisely what have been the real essentials in the pursuit of his craft. I very much doubt if there are any men of real ability who have not, in their time, explored every avenue that offered knowledge and information; and although when they get older they often repudiate the use of this or that study, it can almost be taken for granted that in their youth they were interested in all things connected with the job.

This skull, cut in two, shows the section of the head, and the mere drawing of it must make it clearer in the mind: a reminder that the face one paints is only the front of a head that also has a back although it cannot be seen. It should make an artist realize that he is not merely painting a mask stuck on the background. A very good preparation, for example, for the moment when the artist is confronted with a bald head.

It would be hard to find anything more difficult to paint than a bald head, and only a sound knowledge of the sections of the head and a real mastery of the drawing of form will give the artist confidence in dealing with it. It is also well to remember that although the skull can be relied upon to offer no protest at prolonged study, a bald head may be accompanied by a fidgety temperament, and appear to float about in front of one's eyes like a ping-pong ball on a jet of water. It is possible to discard knowledge that is not needed, but it is never possible to acquire it at a moment's notice.

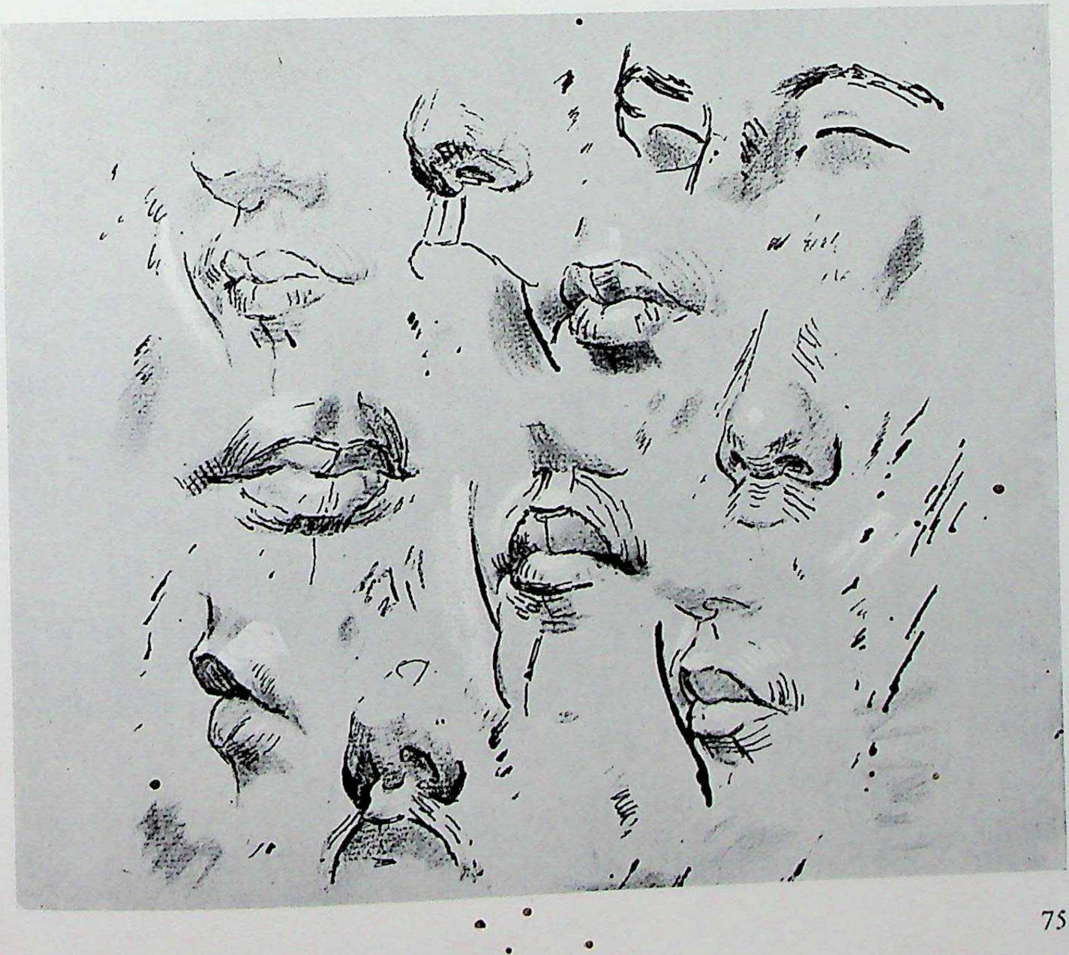
LIPS

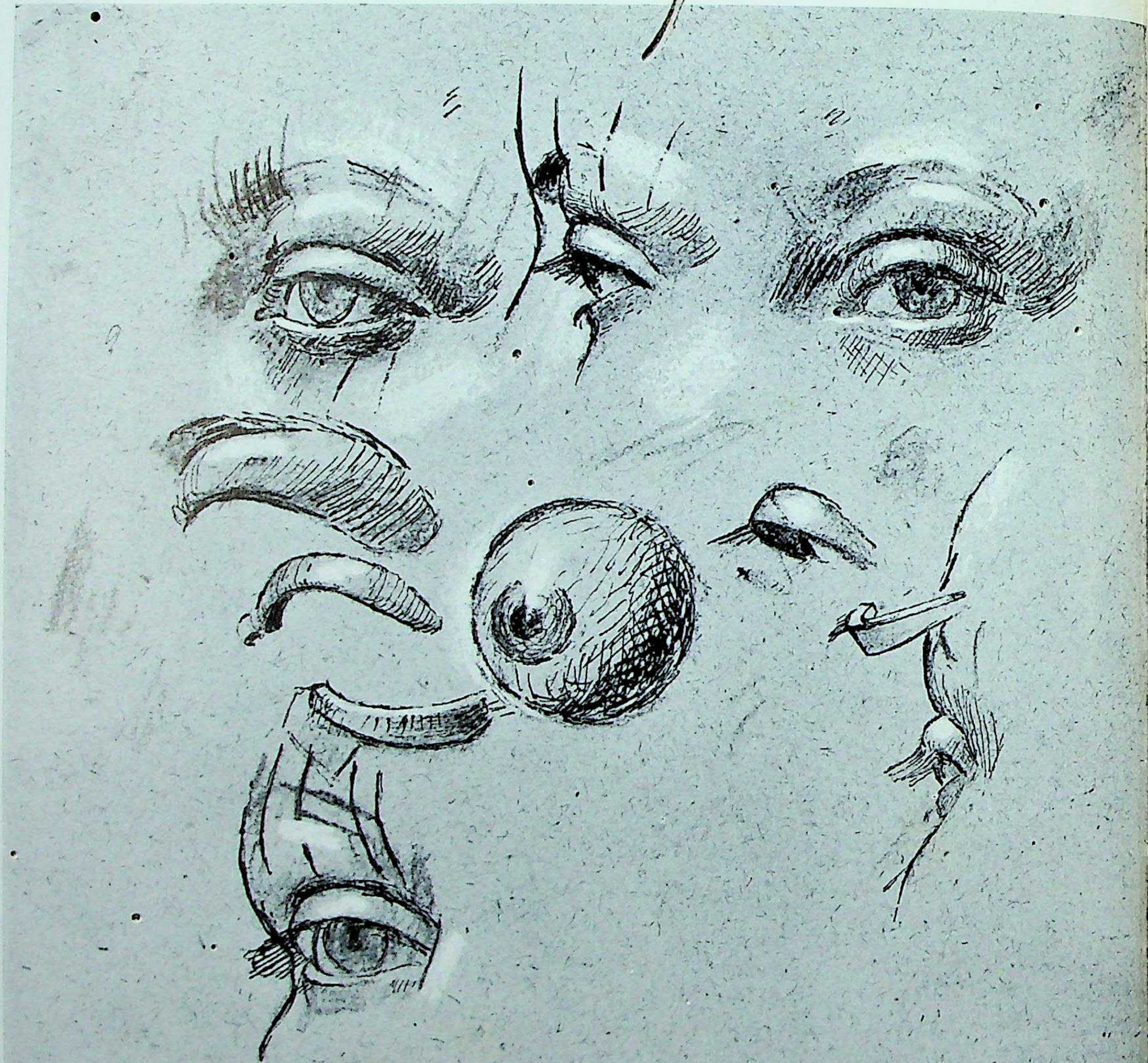
THE DRAWINGS of the lips have been done to show the richness of the forms round the mouth, as well as the formation of the lips themselves.

One of the most common faults in painting occurs in the painting of small darks, such as the darks at the corners of a mouth. All dark tones, small or large, must belong to a piece of form, and there will always be a half-tone and light as well: and the painting of the dark without realization of the fact that it is developing some piece of form is more than likely to be unsatisfactory. Generally, these apparently isolated darks are painted too thin and too dark, and in the same way, isolated lights are painted too light and too small.

To understand, as should be possible from these drawings, how the darks at the corners of the mouth help in the demonstration of the form at the upper lip, should solve some difficulties; and it should be a habit of mind never to paint a dark tone on the head without first deciding the place of the half-tone and light of that particular piece of form.

It may be surprising to observe how round and full are such pieces of form as have been





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shown in these drawings; and one simple fact that does not seem to be generally known is that the further one stands away from a sitter, the more the form of the sitter resolves into tone. The planes disappear, and all one sees is colour and tone. To see form really well one must get close to it, and in painting a head it is essential that now and then one should get very close—look right into the form, in fact, so that some piece can be determined. This difficulty of seeing form at a distance is due to the width between the eyes, which gives a stereoscopic vision: the difficulty becomes less as the difference in proportion to the distance of the object becomes smaller.

THE EYE

THE REASON for study of the actual forms is to enable a quicker and more accurate observation to be developed. The danger lies in merely using the knowledge as a kind of formula, without truly observing the realities. It is often said of the study of anatomy for figure drawing that, having learnt it, it should be forgotten. Certainly, any drawing or painting that looks like a demonstration of knowledge is dull and uninteresting compared with drawings or paintings which are inspired by observation and appreciation. Knowledge and observation still require appreciation to give painting the quality that it should possess.

The drawings of the eye show its main characteristics, and illustrate them in many positions. The eye-ball is round, and the draughtsman-painter must realize that the upper and lower lids follow the curve of the eye-ball. It is difficult to realize the full thickness of the lids, and, unfortunately, any tendency to make the lids thin gives a look of meanness to a painting. On the other hand the ability to see and paint them fairly fat adds to the richness. Some study of the relative thickness of the lids in relation to width and length, and of how other artists have dealt with this problem will certainly help. Looking at portraits by good artists should, in itself, add to one's interest in a technical problem of this kind.

A full study and understanding of the manifold forms of any detail must lead to a better understanding of the whole business of the visual arts. The drawings dealing with the eye show the roundness of the forms of the brow—too often the eyebrow is used as a line between the forehead and the socket of the eye. It is a matter of observation to follow carefully the real movement of the brow. In a three-quarter view of the head it is interesting to notice how the perspective drawing of the brows, together with the drawing of the hair, gives the form of the forehead.

Part of the fascination of portrait painting lies in the fact that the small details, as they are approached, provide problems similar to those of the head as a whole. There is a relationship of the eye to the rest of the head, and that must be settled first. The essential big forms of the eyes, the relationship of the forms to one another, the rhythmical nature of this relationship, the pattern of the shapes, the variety of forms, tones, colour and texture—all these must receive their due share of attention.

CONCLUSION

WHAT DOES one say in concluding a book on portrait painting? I remember during the war a poster which depicted a wheel, a stone, a pair of socks and various other things which I have now forgotten. The caption ran: 'This is the wheel to put one shoulder to, this is the stone to be turned, these are the socks to be pulled up, etc'.

I have put my shoulder to the wheel, I have pulled up my socks and turned every stone I could find and yet I don't suppose I have explored all the crevices of the mind and have, no doubt, left unsaid things I ought to have said.

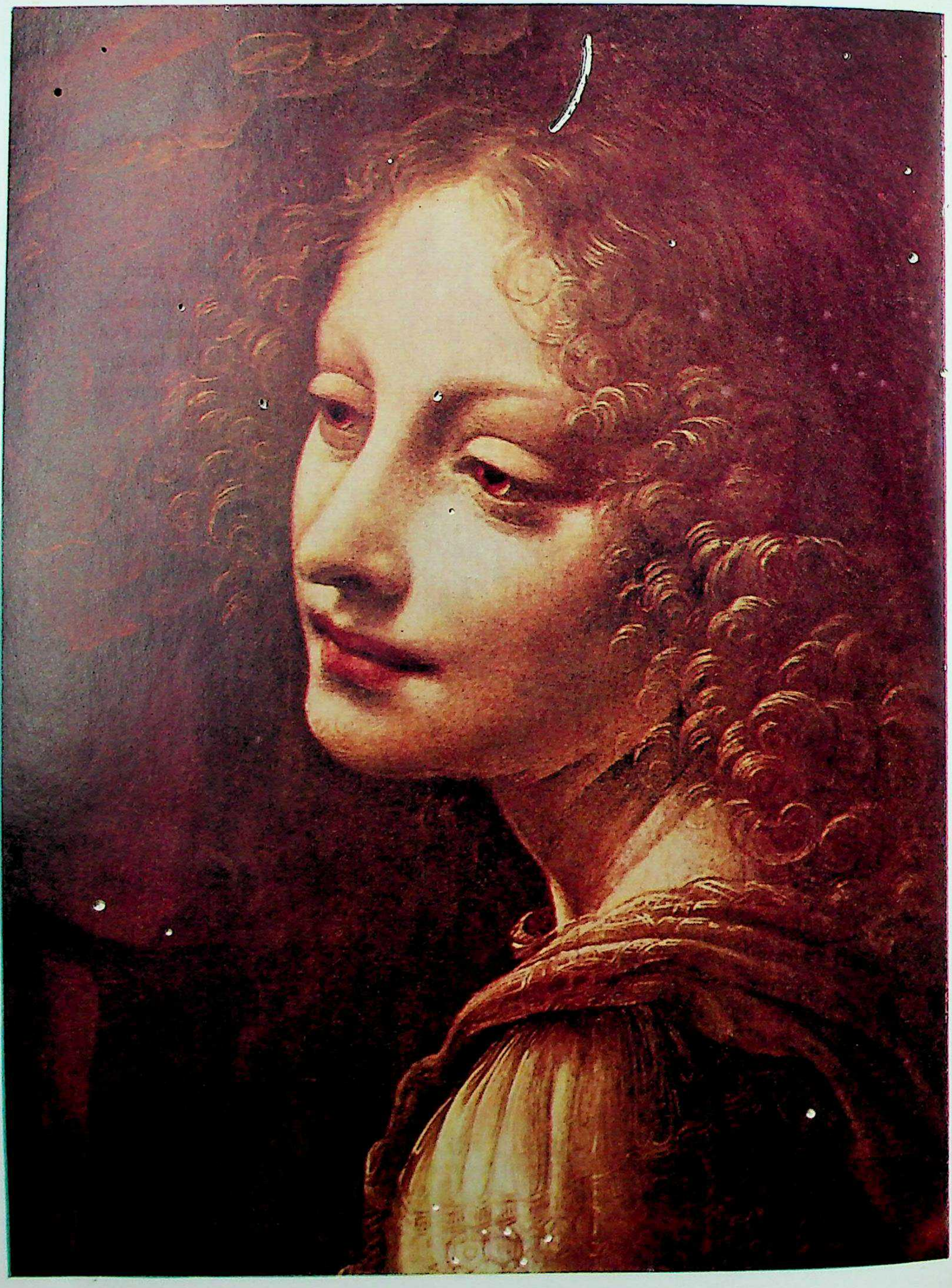
There is no reason to be fainthearted; it is a general truth that nothing is quite so simple as it appears. It is also true that nothing is quite so difficult as it appears.

Get on with the job, get something down on canvas! Keen observation and hard application will bring results. Before long you will discard books on the subject and use your own experience. After all, if I had Mr Rembrandt to dinner I should not be wanting him to tell me how to paint. I should be mildly curious regarding his technical processes, but I should not be asking him with any idea of discovering his secret, or some trick he used. I know his secret, which lies in his profound human sympathy. He had no tricks. Without that sympathy all his beauty of paint would have been of no avail. If the stimulus is strong enough to make you go on working once the first steps have been overcome, then you will not need help. Your aim as an individual is your own and your processes of paint will be developed to fulfil it. That is all Rembrandt did. His technique developed as he gained experience. But what he did is no use to you or I because our aims are different from his.

Children have to be taught their alphabet and how to read, but nobody can teach them to become poets of profound significance. That has to come from within themselves; from an inner knowledge of some deep-seated understanding which science, thank goodness, has as yet not been able to probe.

So to finish this book let me repeat the one really important thing, more important than all others. If you want to get anywhere, what you must do is to start.

SOME PORTRAITS



LEONARDO DA VINCI *1452–1519*

The Madonna of the Rocks (detail)

REPRODUCED BY COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES, THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

THIS HEAD of a girl shows very clearly indeed the complete knowledge of the artist in the matter of the painting of form, combined with a lively appreciation of its rhythmical relationships. It is difficult to assess what qualities of sensitivity, of imagination and of actual knowledge, exist in a mind capable of first seeing, then analysing, and then making this lovely painting. One can only accept the fact that they were working together in perfect harmony.

It is, of course, a coloured drawing and its beauty arises from the drawing of the form. The colour is in a way superimposed on the drawing and not an integral part of the picture as one would find in a Renoir.

Any good artist living today, having absorbed modern ideas on colour and tone relationship, would feel limited if he were forced to return to Leonardo for his method. He is a very great artist, but in life itself one can find even greater inspiration.

VELAZQUEZ *1599–1660*

The Lady with a Fan

LONDON, FROM THE PICTURE IN THE WALLACE COLLECTION: BY PERMISSION

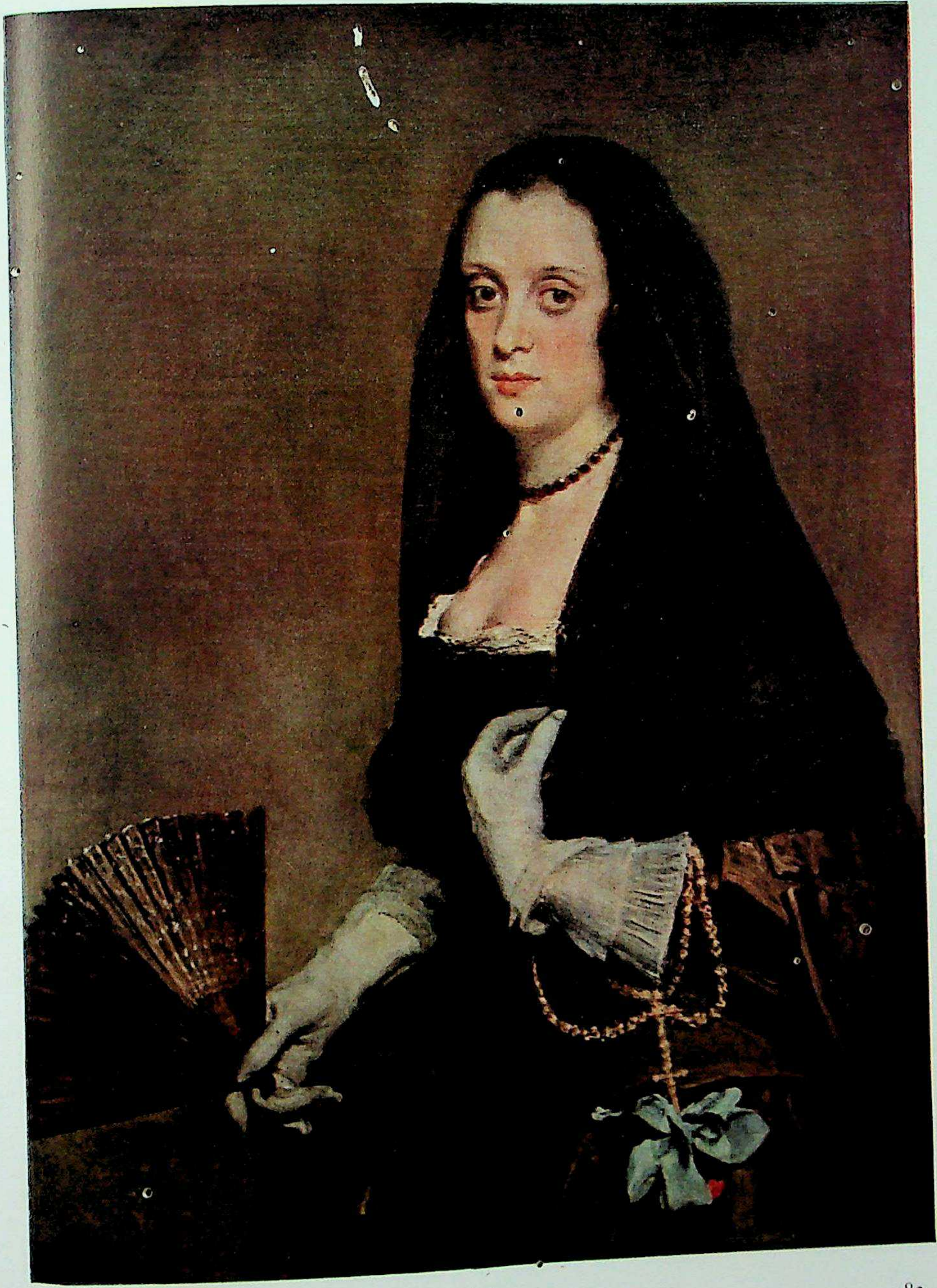
VELAZQUEZ IS very much a painter's painter. Few artists who use oil colours are not thrilled with delight at some time or other by the way Velazquez handles his materials, but he never allows it to obtrude or take precedence over the subject itself.

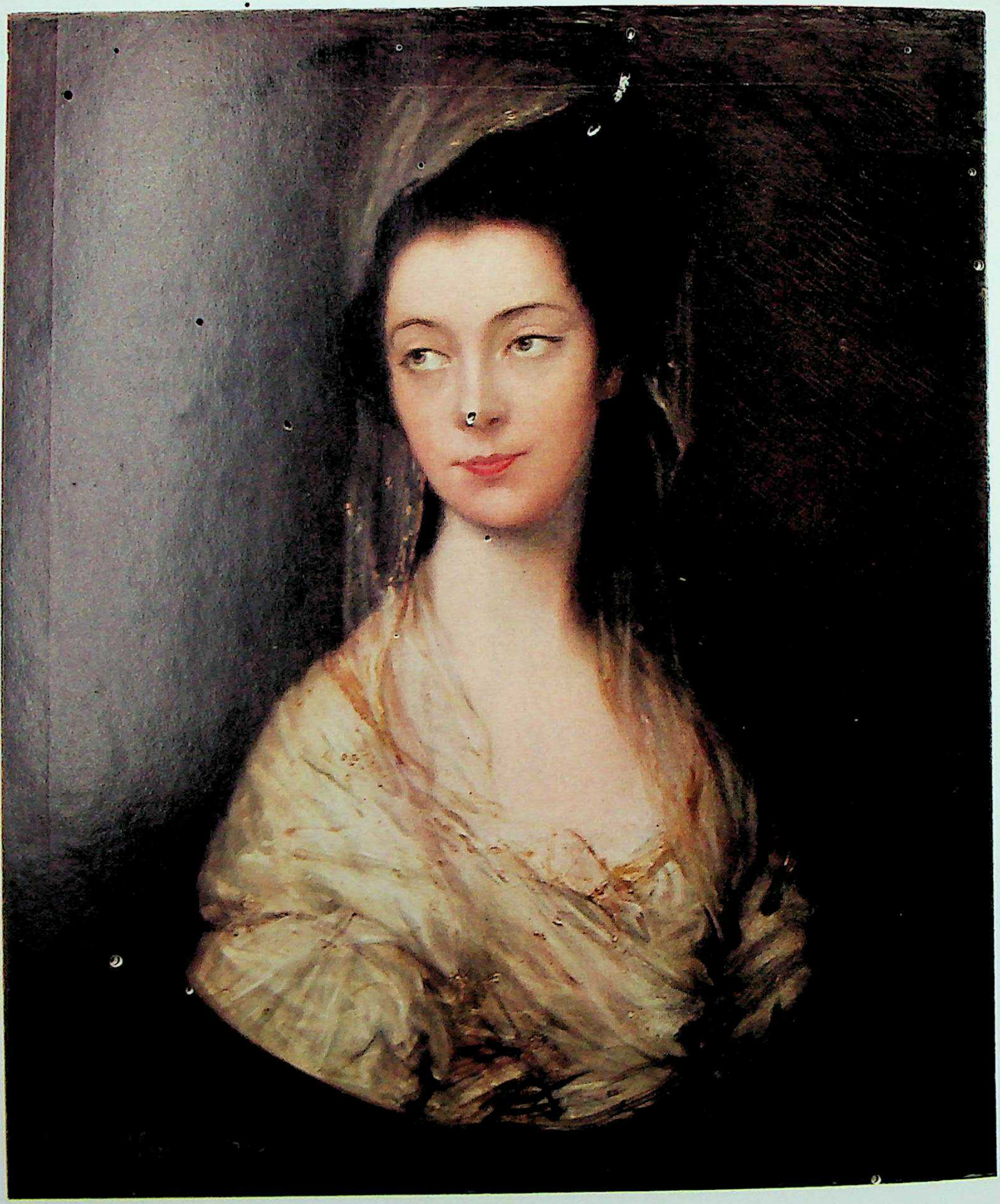
Here we see an excellent portrait, extremely well organized in design, but done with the same simplicity that marks his handling of paint.

His interest in his subject in this painting is the mainspring of its beauty, and his own extraordinary cleverness is concealed by the dignity of his sitter. The joy of his workmanship is all the greater because it has to be sought.

The reason why he is a painter's painter is, I think, because he has great humility when faced by his subjects. He, the artist, does not intrude. No personal ego does he want to display. One can almost see the man looking at his model, advancing to the canvas, carefully making a brush stroke and then stepping back and considering it calmly and dispassionately.

No man can work in a prolonged ecstasy of appreciation. Velazquez was a man who analysed and understood its roots and then painted quite simply.





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THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH *1727–1788*

Portrait of Mrs Horton, afterwards Anne, Duchess of Cumberland

DUBLIN, THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND

IF SHE SAT to Gainsborough any woman with charm could be assured that her beauty would be a joy to all who saw the portrait. His delicacy of perception, combined with his masterly and fluent draughtsmanship, have produced many masterpieces of painting.

In looking at a portrait as lovely as this of Mrs Horton, the skill and knowledge of the artist is lost in the completeness of the expressive force. Which is, of course, as it should be.

The subject dominated his efforts completely. Here are no theories on art, no ideas on how paint should be applied, no obvious brilliance of handling.

Gainsborough was a master draughtsman.

Very rarely does he use any thick paint on the flesh, but often gets quite an impasto on the dress. It is said he used a considerable amount of turpentine in laying the figure in and he must have done a considerable number of portrait heads with one sitting each.

No artist has ever been more sure of his drawing than Gainsborough and this was a necessity to him in order to achieve that elusive beauty he was so fond of.

He is generally considered a painter of women, but some of his portraits of men are magnificent and on these alone he would be considered a master painter.

Gainsborough was one of those artists who needed inspiration from his subject; unlike Reynolds, who had a method and manner that always produced a fairly satisfactory portrait. If Gainsborough saw nothing of interest he got nothing from it and many of his paintings are to be ignored.

EDGAR DEGAS *1834–1917*

Diego Martelli

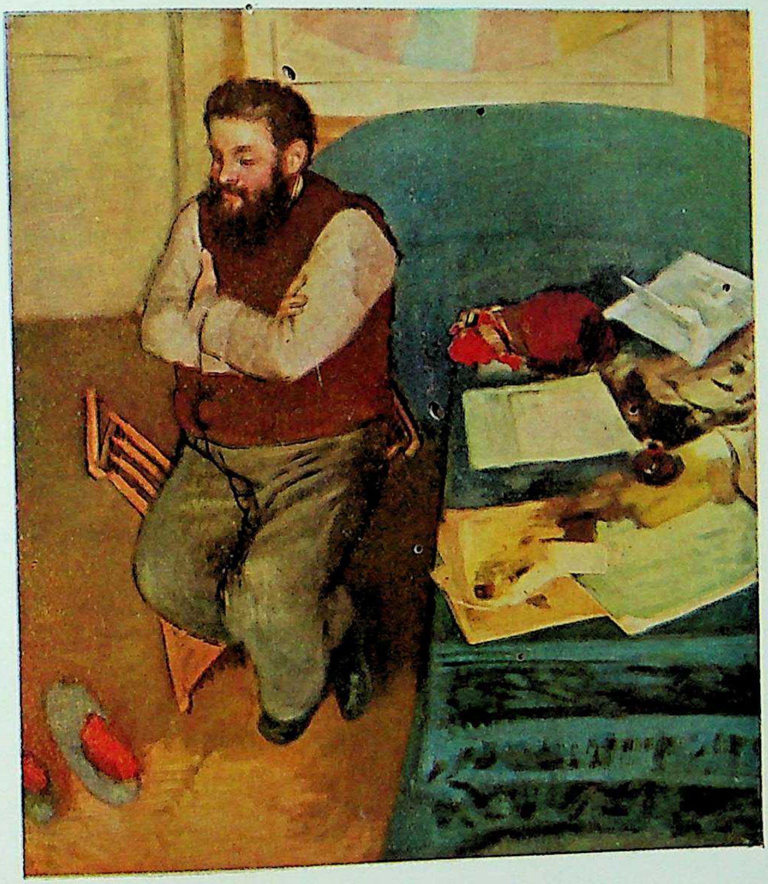
EDINBURGH, BY COURTESY OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES FOR THE NATIONAL GALLERIES OF SCOTLAND

THIS PORTRAIT shows how an artist's attitude towards his sitter may produce a design of unusual character.

By no stretch of imagination could laws of design be demonstrated and explained that could embrace the creation of such a design as this.

It arises entirely from what Degas wanted to say about Diego Martelli. It was not the colour of his eyes or detail of the head—it was, no doubt, the characteristic attitude of the man himself, and of the way in which he fitted into his habitation. The size of the room in relation to the figure, the table and the papers on it, are not an experiment in pattern design, but have grown gradually from Degas' interest in the man himself.

Clear understanding of what an artist wants to say about any subject will always produce its own design, and it will be an original design if the artist's view-point is unusual.



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AMEDEO MODIGLIANI *1884–1920*

Portrait of Madame Zborowska

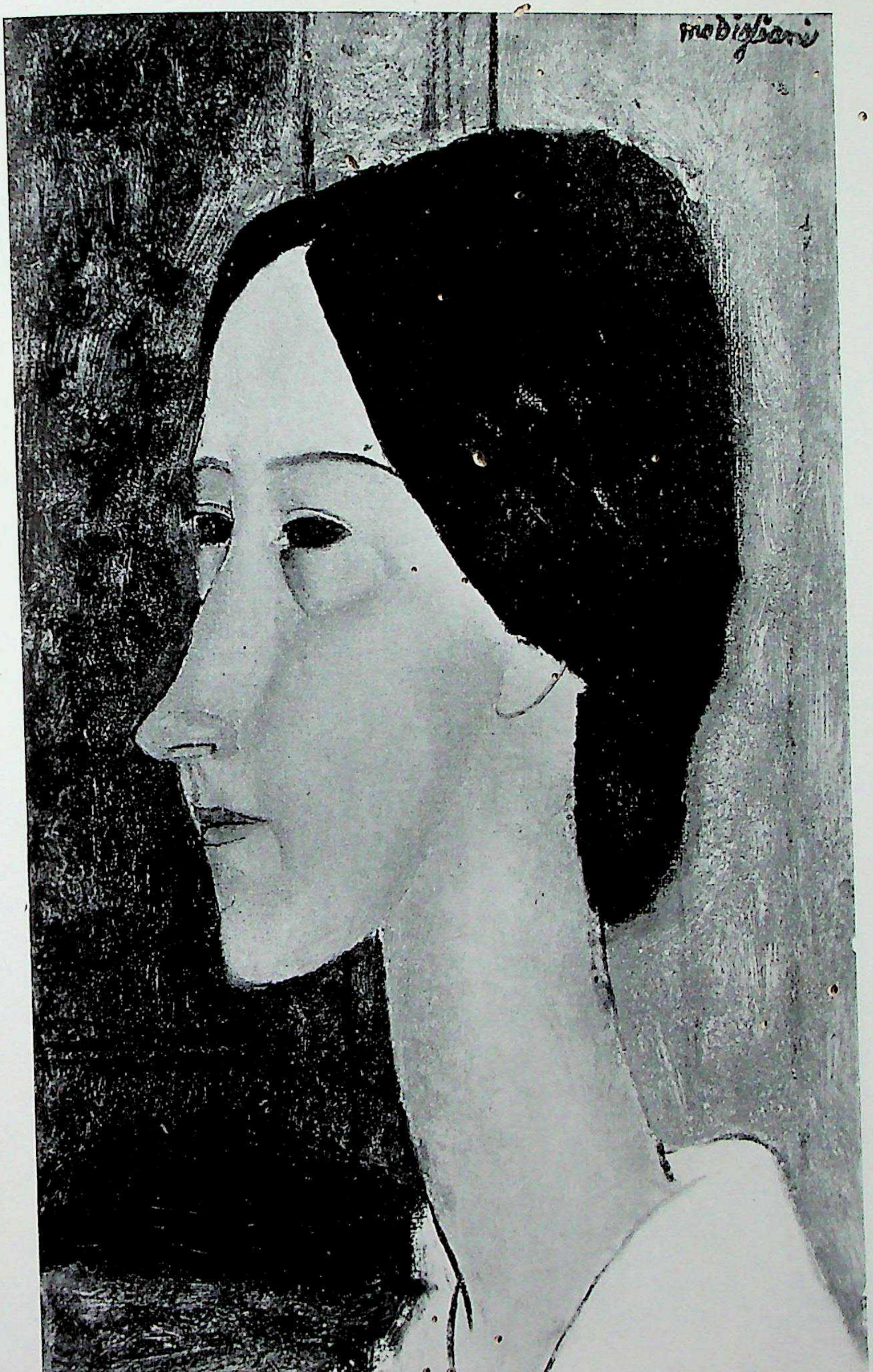
COLLECTION OF A. CONGER GOODYEAR ESQ

THE MODERN interest in abstraction has allowed Modigliani to indulge in an extremely personal appreciation.

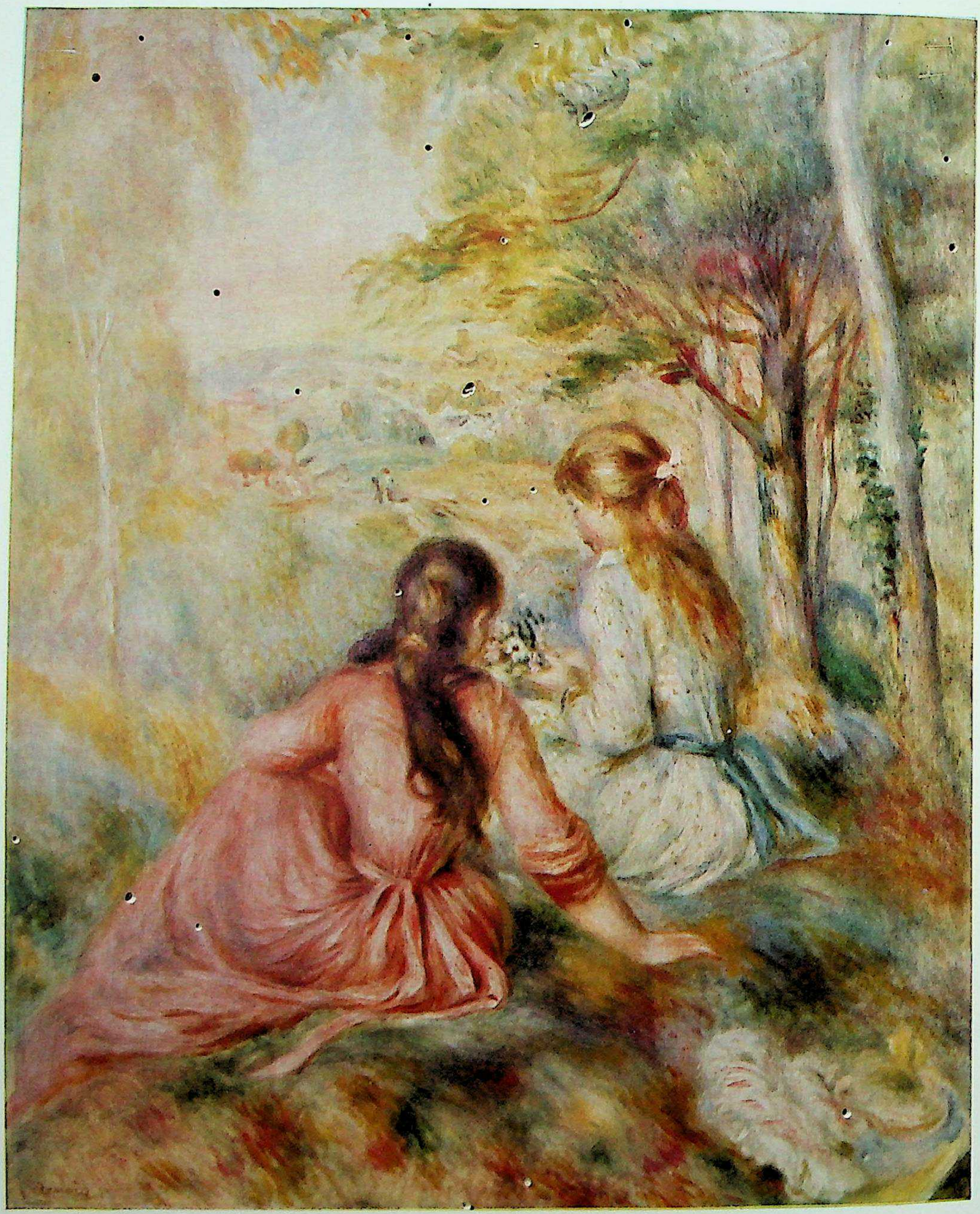
The student of painting has to decide for himself the value of such a painting as this, that is clearly sensitive and artistic and in its own way very attractive.

Does it compete with the great portraits of the past; can it be placed alongside these and hold its own, or is it a highly sophisticated product springing from the present interest in primitive art, an artistic caricature that is for a moment highly fashionable amongst the intelligentsia?

The student must ask himself, if painting is not tied to life, what is it tied to? Is its future to consist entirely of personal idiosyncracies? Have qualities always to be conventional to be of interest? Can aesthetic interest be isolated, and if so, will man no longer wish to paint what he sees? The student must not bury himself entirely amongst the old masters; he should be aware of the most modern examples of portrait painting.



modigliani



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AUGUSTE RENOIR *1841–1916*

In the Meadow

THE LEWISOHN COLLECTION, NEW YORK

THIS CAN hardly be classed as a portrait, but it has been included here because the qualities of charm and delicacy in the painting of these two girls in the country are very fully expressed, and come from an appreciation of the rhythmical flow of forms. To that is added, belonging to it, the lovely tone and colour relations. The way the colour and tone flow all over the picture is an additional virtue bequeathed to us by the Impressionists, and Renoir is a master in this quality.

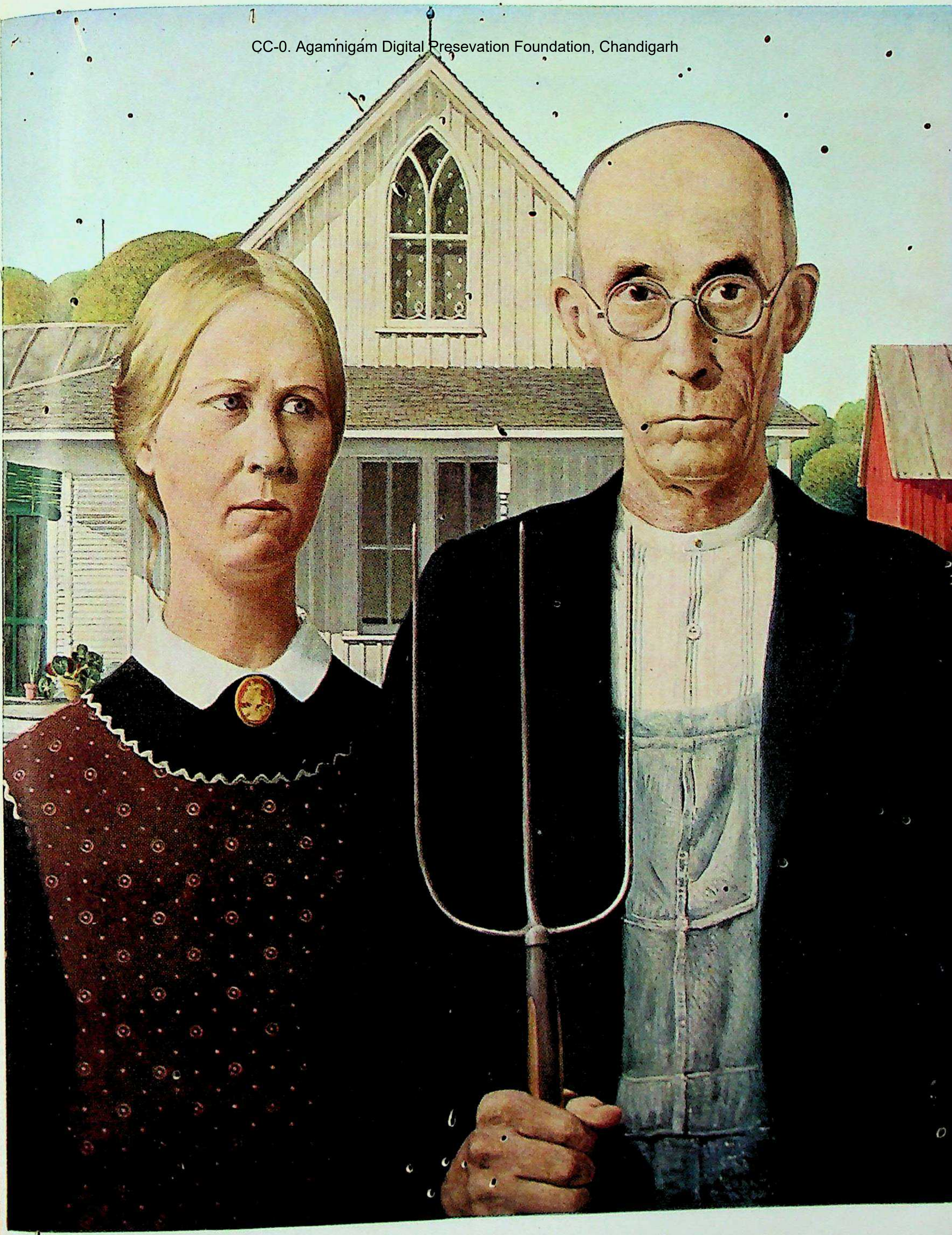
Here again, it is clear that the quality the artist wishes to express has moulded his technique, and so the fusion of forms by light and colour is fully achieved.

GRANT WOOD

American Gothic

THE AVERAGE person who considers himself knowledgeable in art is generally so influenced by French sophistication that any portrait such as this, that deals with an entirely different side of life, comes as a shock. It must be admitted, however, that this painting does express, with unusual force, the forbidding characters of the people portrayed, the censorious attitude they would hold of any virtues but their own.

The precision of drawing is reminiscent of early Dutch painting, but there is no indication that this arises from any effort by the artist to imitate the early painters. It arises, so far as one can judge, from the artist's attachment and interest in the living of these people and though the artist discards all knowledge and appreciation of design such as has been developed in Europe for several centuries, its simplicity of ideas and the force with which those ideas have been expressed make the painting one of real interest.



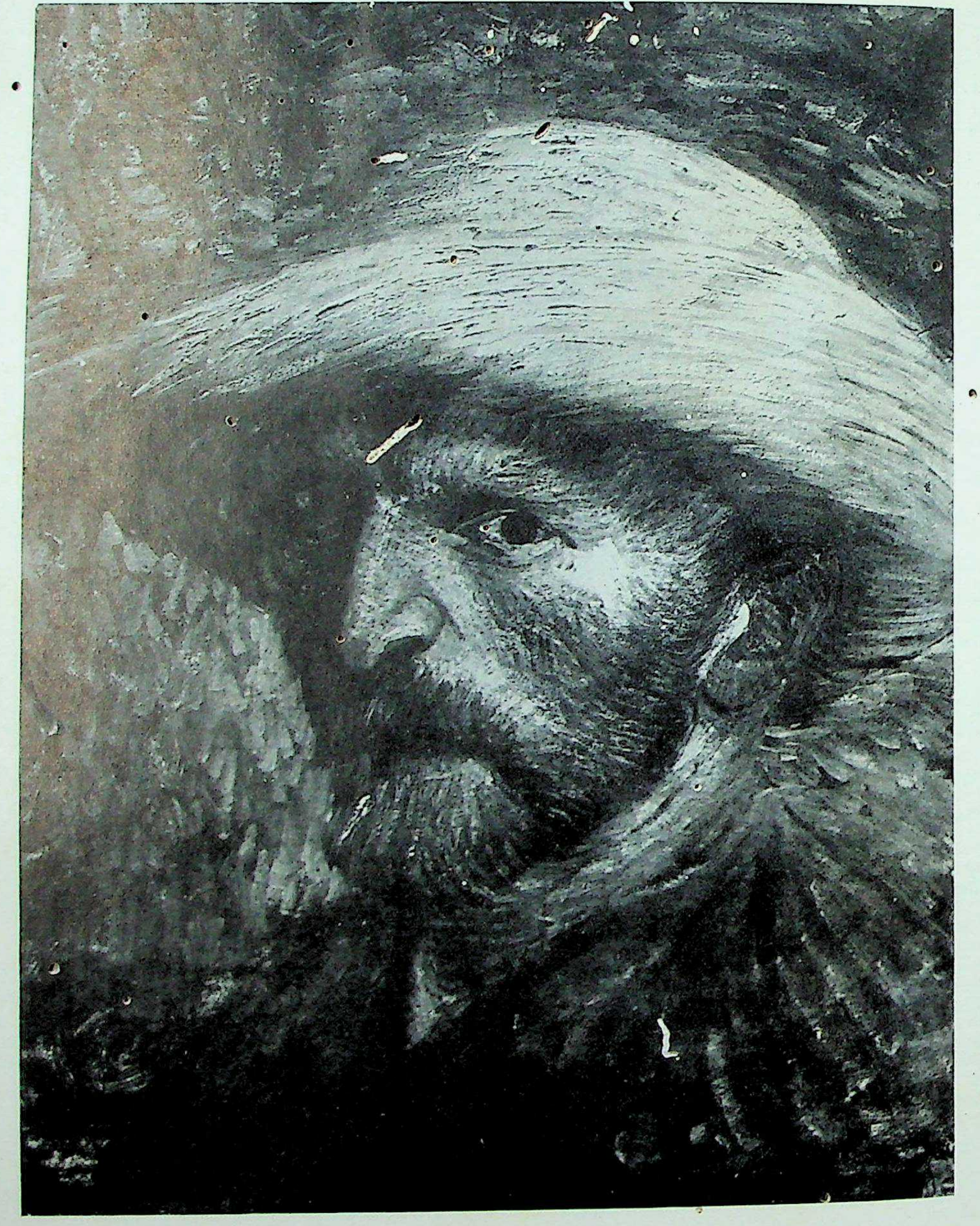


PHOTO: BERNHEIM-JEUNE

VINCENT VAN GOGH *1853–1890*

Self-portrait

THE OBVIOUS vitality in this portrait arises from the power of the form: from the roundness of the brow, the way the nose juts out, the simple but true form of the cheek, the forward movement of the beard. The vigorous brush strokes being in harmony with the whole idea of the painting and giving emphasis to Van Gogh's conception.

This portrait is an excellent example of how the artist has evolved his processes of painting to fit his vision.

It is difficult to say if this springs from original genius or from intellectual understanding, but what is clear is that it starts from a powerful urge to paint.

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